GREED

ISSUE #4 1988

U.S. PRICE $2.50

MUSIC, COMICS, AND BIG LAFFS

THAT PETROL EMOTION

THE LIME SPIDERS

LIVE SKULL

FIRE PARTY

CARTOONIST PETER BAGGE

THOUSANDS OF DROOLING VINYL-CRAZED COLLECTOR GEEKS

THE ANGRY GHOST OF ELVIS PRESLEY

Greed Magazin
#4 1988

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PETER BAGGE GETS MIFFED

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GREED

A BLEAK HOUSE PUBLICATION

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GREED MAGAZINE
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Elvis: Nice Guy or Garbage Wrapped in Skin?

Beats me. But after a year of planning and a week of layout that I'm doing here in Arizona during what is supposed to be my vacation, the Burning With Elvis in Hell issue is seeing print. We're all very thrilled about the whole thing. One point worth mentioning: By "Hell" I mean Memphis and the Graceland state of mind. It's kind of a metaphor, understand? Do you? Are you sure? An alternate title for this issue could be "Raping a Corpse," which is, once again, *kind of a metaphor.* The management is not saying that Elvis is literally burning in hell (mostly because the management doesn't buy into that whole concept), and we certainly don't condone sex with the dead, although, as Dr. Ruth would say, as long as it's okay with your partner, nothing is out of bounds, and the chances of your partner objecting would be pretty slim. But I digress.

KS in the jeep Elvis drove in *Girl Happy.*

Elvis was trivialized for your sins, boys and girls. And he was trivialized by his own sins as well. No greater sacrifice hath one man made for so little.

A few words about our wonderful contributors: **Bob Burnett** contributed a "thinking person's comic" to our last issue. This issue he's collaborated with **Linda Muriello.**

The **Mark Sullivan** who writes about Elvis Lit is not the Mark Sullivan in the DC band Kingface.

Bass-popping **Bert Queiroz** just got back from England. He's between bands again.

James Wu got out of college a few months ago and is now recklessly spending your tax dollars on stamps and paper clips for the Federales.

Amy Pickering is in a swell little band called Fire Party (see page 46).

John Crawford, creator of the infamous Baboon Dooley, has a collection of his Dooley strips coming out soon through the Popular Reality press in lovely Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Jeff Nelson, who cut the screens for our cover, also periodically hits stuff with sticks (most recently for a band called 3). A performance video of Mr. Nelson's old combo, Minor Threat, is now available from Dischord Records. Jeff's strong sense of design recently caught the eye of many porcine government officials.

Heather Green works at the *Washington Post,* picking lint out of Ben Bradlee's belly button.

Charles Burns is one of the five greatest artists working in the comics medium today. *Hard-Boiled Defectives* (RAW/Pantheon), a trade-paperback collection of Burns' work, is available now at bookstores near you.

Sydney Carton lost his head in Paris. He's much better now.

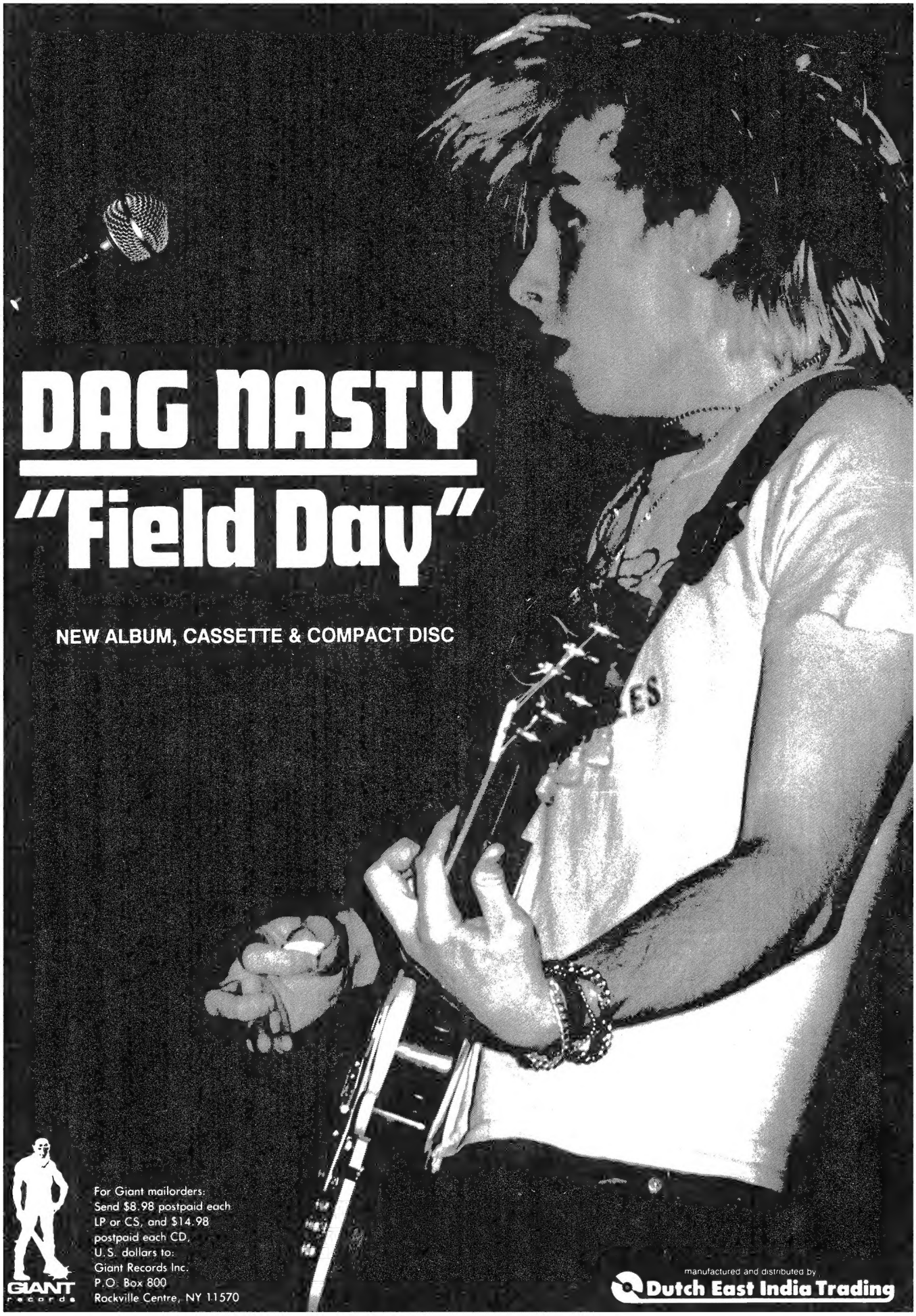
Peter Bagge? There's a big article about him starting on page 14. Read it thoroughly. You will be tested on this material at a later date.

On sale in June or thereabouts: GREED #5—The Death Before Dishonor issue (see page 49 for details). This will contain the Clive Barker piece that got bounced from this issue due to lack of space.

Thanks to everyone who performed on "GREED night" at d.c. space February 25. I'm sure I had a wonderful time and I think that all of you did, too, especially when Guy and Brendan sawed that chorus girl in half. It's about time someone brought quality entertainment back to this city! Special thanks to Caroline Ely for organizing the event while I was having a nervous breakdown. Caroline also played at the show in a band called Doktor Püke. Kinda of a gnarly speedmetal thing, dude.

Thanks to the *CityPaper* for the "Best Art Director" award. Thanks to Lou Bank. Thanks to those distributors who haven't gone out of business owing us lots of money.—**K.S.**

Scanned by Neon Vincent in December of 2015.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SST

the PROBLEM of being PERFECT

At a recent party Mr. Ethics met a group of ill-bred strangers who, upon learning that Mr. Ethics writes monthly on matters of correct moral and ethical behavior, immediately asked if it is difficult to embody ethical perfection day in and day out. "Surely even Mr. Ethics must slip up sometime!" they exclaimed, snorting a fine mist of champagne from their mocking nostrils.

Mr. Ethics, of course, could only laugh at their stupidity. Dear readers, Mr. Ethics well realizes the awesome responsibility of writing this column, but to be quite honest, the mantle of ethical perfection sits lightly upon his slightly padded shoulders. Mr. Ethics would not have the bad taste to write this column if he were cut from the same ratty piece of sackcloth as the rest of humanity. True, Mr. Ethics sometimes errs, but always on the side of caution.

Alas, the same cannot be said of Mr. Ethics' many friends and acquaintances. When Mr. Ethics needs to be reminded of the basest qualities of human nature, he need only turn to them (and he often does, especially when he needs ideas for this column).

For a case in point, consider a married Midwestern couple whom we shall call "Rick" and "June." (Although their actual names are Robert and Janet and they live in Evanston, Illinois.)

This year Rick, Mr. Ethics' college roommate and a steadfast friend for a decade, secured a teaching position in the Department of Wrestling Philosophy at Northwestern University. Mr. Ethics visited Rick last fall, anxious to hoist an ale or two with his bosom chum and meet Rick's bride, June.

Upon his arrival, Mr. Ethics and the charming young couple dined at a local restaurant. As he feasted, Mr. Ethics couldn't help but notice that June was exposing far more cleavage than is normally considered socially acceptable in the Chicago area. The comely wench even smiled at Mr. Ethics several times, entirely without provocation. Naturally, Mr. Ethics assumed that June was extending a sexual invitation. "I want to feel your moist, somewhat flabby but not entirely unappealing flesh against my supple amber skin," her glittering eyes seemed to say.

That evening, as he lay on the sofabed in Rick and June's living room, Mr. Ethics pondered his dilemma. Should he accept the invitation posed by June's perky young breasts, and risk jeopardizing his friendship with Rick? Or should he warn his longtime fraternity brother that June was a deranged slut overdue for a stay in the sanatorium? What would Aristotle have done in this situation? What would William James have to say?

The sight of June brazenly strutting into the kitchen wearing nothing but a floor-length flannel nightgown quickly made up Mr. Ethics' mind. The lonely waif was obviously crying out for affection, the kind of affection that Mr. Ethics knows for a fact Rick can only provide in small amounts. Mr. Ethics, of course, has two fistfuls of affection, a fact he pointed out to June as he tiptoed nude across the pile carpeting.

The melee that followed is typical of the nonlinear thinking and general instability one finds in even one's closest companions. Mr. Ethics doesn't wish to go into detail, but suffice to say June was unable to appreciate the immensity of Mr. Ethics' offering, as her beating Mr. Ethics about the loins with an omelet pan well proves.

Worse still, Rick believed his wife's claim that when Mr. Ethics asked the brazen tart to "hide the salami" he was not speaking in the culinary sense. Brandishing a 3-foot cast iron Giacometti reproduction, Rick advanced on Mr. Ethics, egged on by the despoiled harpy he had so unwisely wed. Only repeated threats to reveal Rick's numerous collegiate homosexual experiences to Rick's father, a leader of the Robertson For President Campaign, saved Mr. Ethics from cranial trauma.

What lessons can we draw from this sad tale? First of all, this: The Ethical Man can trust no one out-

(Continued on page 6)

the PROBLEM of being PERFECT

(from page 5)

side of himself, least of all the assorted vermin and hangers-on that claim to be his friends. But what is the true measure of a friend? Simple. Ask yourself this question: If I sleep with my friend's wife, will he be angry? If the answer is yes, he is not a true friend.

The second lesson is as timeless as it is obvious: Beware the female of the species. One minute she's raising her blouse and asking you to salute, the next she's screaming hysterically because you waved your wand at her embroidered undies.

And above all remember the third, and most important, lesson: Trust yourself above all others. Ethical codes are self-defined; reality is subjective. And since reality is subjective, and since your reality is the only reality you directly experience, who is to say that your reality and your way of thinking isn't infinitely superior to everyone else's? To my mind, I did Rick and June a favor by responding to what seemed an anguished cry for love from a woman whose husband was incapable of satisfying her; to Rick and June, I gather, I was a madman who shook his fleshy salt shaker at his best friend's wife.

Who is to say who's right?

I am, of course.

After all, I'm Mr. Ethics.

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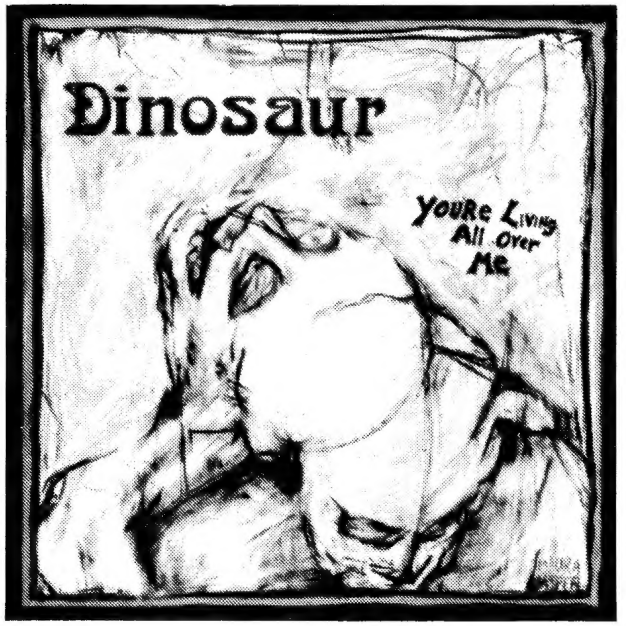

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So Dooley, like what's the worst thing that ever happened to you?
The worst thing... hmm.. there were soo many..
oooh!
There was the time my drunken Dad dumped a bucket of shit on my head..
Coo Coo Coo Coo Coo
And then there was the time I got beat-up at School by mean old Bill Goodheart..
Kick his ass Bill!
Bap!
Um, And uh, then..
:Yawn:
These are incredibly fascinating events Baboon,
really they are
But they do not compare with what is going to happen to you now!
EEEii!!
Sizzle
Zizzz!
Note: This brain frying experience goes on for 5 or 6 hours or so.
Baboon returns to reality + finds himself wandering naked thru the city w/ a lampshade on his head!
I hope these People know I'm an arts person!
Look!
Yi!
EEK!
ooh!

©1/88 John Crawford

ELVIS LIT

Mark Sullivan on print incarnations of the King

In many ways Elvis is more interesting dead than alive. He's an intriguing cultural artifact. Far from dying with the King, his value as an icon has mushroomed—and not always from authorized sources.

The King is dead! Long live the King's impersonators!

Only in America would we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty with 200 Elvis impersonators on stage at the same time. Speaking of which, ever wonder why all of the impersonators ape the fat, weary Elvis of the 1970s? That is the starting point of *Stark Raving Elvis* by William McCranor Henderson (Fireside Books, which seriously goofed by releasing the paperback version of this book several weeks after the 10th anniversary of His death). In the book, Byron "Blue-Suede" Bluford is "the only authentic practitioner of the Elvis Presley tradition." At a 1976 concert, Elvis gave Byron a .22 Savage revolver; Byron took it as the passing of the torch. Byron impersonates the early Elvis—his pink pants and purple sports coat could have been bought from Lansky Brothers in Memphis, 1954—and tears down the house weekly in a run-down bar in South Portland, Maine.

From the beginning, Byron is intent on reaching Colonel Tom Parker, first to convince him Elvis' 1970s style is a mistake, then, after the King dies, to offer himself as Elvis' replacement. After punching out the foreman on his day job, Byron splits for the big-time in Vegas. There he lives out the quote from Richard Nixon on the dedication page: "Once you get into this great stream of history, you can't get out." In preparation for the Great Elvis Showdown, where Byron hopes to finally attract the Colonel's attention, the mimic's new agent promotes him from Prince Byron to King Byron, booking him in bigger and bigger venues around Vegas.

Along with an agent, Byron attracts his own version of the Memphis Mafia. He also gets strung out on booze and drugs, porks out, and, finally, adopts Elvis' later style in his stage act. By the time of the competition, Byron is so crazed that when the contest officials vote against the obvious wishes of the crowd and choose a more tractable Elvis (having big marketing plans in mind), Byron takes the gun the King gave him and holds the judges and other contestants hostage.

Stark Raving Elvis is far from the first Elvis novel. That was probably *Spider Kiss* by Harlan Ellison, originally published as *Rockabilly* in 1961. "Stag Preston" is obviously Presley; Colonel Jack Freeport his Parker. Elvis has also made barely disguised appearances in works as varied as "Flintstones" episodes and the play and movie "Bye Bye Birdie." Similarly, the title character in Gail Brewer-Georgio's 1979 novel *Orion* is an Elvis clone who is in turn aped by a would-be star calling himself Orion. All of these books are depictions, usually negative, of the early Elvis.

Elvis impersonators have popped up elsewhere in the literary world and pop culture. Michelle Pfeiffer's brother in John Landis' underrated film *Into the Night* was one. His was only a quick cameo in a manic movie, but Elvis imitators hold far more substantial roles in a number of other places, including Art Bourgeau's *The Elvis Murders* (Charter Books), a well-plotted, well-written mystery set at yet another Elvis impersonator contest. Radio Johnson, the impersonator set to win this fixed contest, is also a target for murder. Bourgeau has as much to say about the impersonator phenomenon as Henderson, and they two are largely in agreement. Both believe that contests of this sort may be harmless larks for the fans, but the impersonators are not so innocent. They have committed themselves to living a fulltime fantasy of youth and fame.

Both books end with the impersonator shucking his Elvis shell—Byron sparks a mini *Day of the Locust*-type riot when he throws his authentic Elvis jumpsuit into the adoring crowd; Radio Johnson chooses one of his own compositions for his last song, and I do mean last.

An impersonator also figures prominently in the first few issues of the comic book *It's Science With Dr. Radium* (Slave Labor Graphics), which brings us aliens and the extra-human Elvi. In their song "Elvis is Everywhere," Mojo Nixon and Skid Roper tell us that in the future we will all look like Elvis, the one perfect being, due to Elvis-lution. Well, that is certainly true of Radium's Elvi, who take a vacation from the future to visit present-day Graceland. During their sightseeing trip they mistake a failed Elvis impersonator for the real thing and take him back to their own time. At first he is only too happy to be worshipped, but like his idol, the copy soon tires of life in a fishbowl and runs away screaming.

Also worth mentioning are the numerous appearances of "Kid Creole" and his many clones in DC Comics' short-lived *Thriller*. Kid Creole, very clearly patterned on the Elvis-as-Victim-of-Capitalism mythos, has been cloned many times over by unscrupulous managers who want to keep their meal ticket young, alive and raking in the dough. When a clone ages, he's discarded and a new

(Continued on page 10)

GOING FOR BAROQUE

James Wu on Tom Wolfe's First Novel, a look at Yuppie Scum

The Bonfire of the Vanities
by Tom Wolfe
(Farrar, Straus, Giroux)

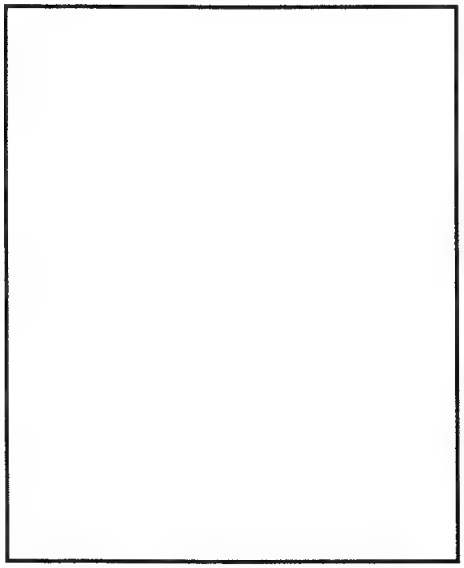
Well, all of the big guns have weighed in with their opinions of Tom Wolfe's first fictional (financial?) magnum opus: the *Washington Post*'s Jonathan Yardley compared it to Scott Turow's blathering *Presumed Innocent* as an "unusually accomplished" novel on "the imperfect workings of justice;" Frank Rich (?!) in *The New Republic* thought that Wolfe hadn't really succeeded in skewering every possible target in the New York caste scene (like Rich would know); Frank Conroy in the *New York Times* actually faulted Wolfe for "a tendency to embrace the grotesque;" *Time* and *Newsweek* positively gushed (and *Time* provided more about Wolfe's personal life than I cared to know—at least *Newsweek* actually talked to him); and John Leonard in *The Nation* penned a doctoral thesis comparing *Bonfire* to the latest issue of *Dissent*.

What no one seems to have noticed is that Wolfe wrote a better first novel two years ago.

Oh, they've all made the proper noises about it: "...its origins in a serial...ran in 27 installments...on deadline, Dickens..." Harrumph, as Wolfe would write. As Wolfe said, however, in the acknowledgment to "the daring of Jann Wenner" in the novel's indicia, the serial was written "without a safety net," which is probably why it works better.

It's a rare treat to be able to read an advance manuscript of a noted author's work. And I'm usually inclined to agree that it's better to allow a writer to fine tune his words before letting them loose upon the world, even to the point of deciding not to loose them at all—Hemingway's *Garden of Eden*, for example, was a great mistake.

Wolfe's polishing act here, though, is a mistake of a different stripe. The term "overwrought" leaps to mind. In comparing the serial version to the novel, most of the changes I noticed were for the better, but some of them were downright irksome (see sidebar). The entire structure of *Bonfire* has been redone, sadly—even Dickens remained faithful to his serial chapters when he had them published as collected novels.



Bonfire of the Vanities author Tom Wolfe in his trademark white suit in the middle of a snowstorm.

But...

While perhaps a bit too shiny around the edges, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* is still worth investing in as a good solid read. Of course, you should be familiar with Wolfe's work before plunging into this—otherwise, his tone can be quite jarring at times. It's hard for some people to understand how such a straight like Wolfe could be so attracted to the fast-track sleaze of the late 20th Century (as Hunter S. Thompson once observed). And some of his comments on racial tensions can strike you the wrong way, unless you're aware that Wolfe's attempting to satirize racial views, not *promulgate* them.

And let us not forget Tom Wolfe's particularly scintillating verbosity.

(Continued on page 10)

CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

Beginning in 1984, *Rolling Stone* magazine printed biweekly excerpts from Tom Wolfe's novel-in-progress, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. In late 1987 the published novel appeared, substantially altered from its previous incarnation. Following is a by-no-means comprehensive list of alterations Wolfe made to his manuscript.

WHAT WOLFE TOOK OUT

- **A Man in Slices:** Sherman's writing career is out (see below).
- **The First Lady:** Judy McCoy's dilemmas have been excised, probably the largest omission.
- **Skinny Boys at Hammamet:** The Del Ponces have become the Bavardages in the novel, losing poor old laughing Leon in the process.
- **Officer Occhiocione:** Sherman does *not* wreck the Mercedes in the novel. (Sigh.)

WHAT WOLFE PUT IN

- **The Master of the Universe:** Sherman's now on Wall Street, which makes it okay to dump on him (after all, if you have that much money, it's only fair to have to lose it all eventually, right?).
- **Larry's Libido:** Sherman's fixation with girls in brown lipstick has been transposed to Larry for the novel, so that Kramer receives a much different fate in the book (as does Sherman).
- **The Koran:** Herbert 92X is a new curve from Wolfe's mound, rather unpleasant but not without laughs.

WHAT WOLFE RENAMED

- **The McCoys' daughter:** "Janie" is now "Campbell," in keeping with Sherman's transformation into a raving Yup.
- **The McCoys' maid:** "Inez" is now "Bonita," but why I can't say.

ELVIS LIT

(from page 8)
Creole is grown. Eventually the clones avenge their honor and that of the original Kid.

As for the strangest Elvis spin-offs, it's a toss-up between Gary Panter's *Invasion of the Elvis Zombies* (RAW Books One-Shot) and Lester Bang's piece "From Notes for Review of Peter Guralnick's *Lost Highway*" in the recently-released Bangs collection *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung* (Knopf). Panter's book is deranged, depicting crazed Elvis zombies wreaking havoc at grocery store openings and suburban homes. The zombies' exploits are rendered in Panter's unique art style, combining elements of cubism, German Expressionism, and Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. This is a brave work that requires multiple readings to glean even the slightest idea of what's going on.

The Bangs piece, which has been justifiably cited in every one of the million-plus reviews of *Psychotic Reactions*, supposes what it might be like to scoop out and eat the drugs in the decomposing stomach of Elvis' disinterred body. By partaking of the body, Bangs becomes the King. Though launched from a deranged premise (probably inspired by *The Golden Bough*), it's easily the best and most sympathetic depiction of Late Period Elvis. The various non-fiction books about the King cannot touch the psychological insight in this fictional piece. It's a vast improvement on Bang's earlier printed piece, "Graceland Uber Alles," from *The Complete Elvis* (Delilah), which conjures a meeting between the King and Bob Dylan.

Late Period Elvis also reigns from the covers of the supermarket sleaze rags. Just recently, the National Examiner ran a cover story about the dead Elvis craving fan mail (sorry, I only read the cover so I don't know the address or how much postage is required to cross the veil). These rags generally cast celebrities in one of two roles—underneath it all, stars are either just like us (simple folk who deserve their success), or they're rich but miserable. At first it seems odd that Elvis' life, which certainly falls into the money-can't-buy-happiness category, is instead seen as a "just folks" saga. I think it's a case of tailoring the message to the audience—tabloid buyers are among Elvis' most rabid fans.

Which brings us back to the question of why Late Period Elvis seems to be the King's enduring image. Most of us tend to value the music of our teens, listening over and over to the records we prized then or to new records by aging artists. Elvis' fans are middle-aged now. His presence kept them young. In a way they are mourning the death of their youth when they mourn Elvis, as a slightly younger generation mourns John Lennon.

Some of these fans forget the shock Elvis gave the world in his heyday—the PMRC's Susan Baker, for one, looks at Elvis with misty eyes, even though Elvis' sexuality sparked far more controversy in the 1950s than the antics of current bad boys such as Motley Crue and Prince ever have. Many fans deny Elvis' drug habit or argue that he was addicted to prescription drugs, not illegal drugs (if the drugs are legal, then apparently it's okay to be addicted to them). Fans focus instead on his devotion to his mother, his love of God, his manners and his fabled generosity. If Elvis' faults are conceded at all, they are generally laid at the feet of Colonel Tom Parker, who isolated Elvis from his fans and turned the baddest of the bad boys into a sanitized Las Vegas nightclub singer.

Elvis' humanity is an integral part of his myth, much of which corresponds surprisingly close to the facts. One of the reasons I couldn't force myself through *Elvis: The Novel* (Granada-Britain), a British fictionalized account of Elvis' career and life "as they should have happened," was because it rang so false—all of the most spectacular aspects of the story are true, and the supposedly witty insertions merely intrusive. (The book isn't nearly as clever as Mark Shipper's often-hilarious pseudo-bio of the Beatles, *Paperback Writer*.) Elvis' was a real-life Horatio Alger story, the American Dream in action. A poor truck driver walks into the Memphis Recording Service to cut a song for his mother's birthday and winds up the world's greatest superstar.

Who can fault anyone for clinging to his legend? ■

Wolfe in the Bonfire

(from page 9)
The man oozes words. Many people I know find his diction tiresome and redundant, but I've always admired the way he simply strings words together so that they flow smoothly through one's mind. Occasionally the stream hits some turbulence: at one point, in describing the ornate details of a Bronx courthouse, he notes that "Solomon himself, who was a king (sic), would have found it imposing." Tom, we know who Solomon was.

When you look at the alternatives, however, you could stand to do considerably worse damage to your brain cells with what's out there now. To name some names, there are those dreadful "Washington novels" by Mo Dean and Sally Quinn, not to mention *Patriot Games* (huh), which reads as if Clancy xeroxed different pages of Robert Ludlum novels out of sequence...Ah, but I stray from the path.

In sum, it's true that Tom Wolfe is the master of overstatement. But in the current minimalist rage going on in literature, Wolfe really is a breath of fresh (hot) air.

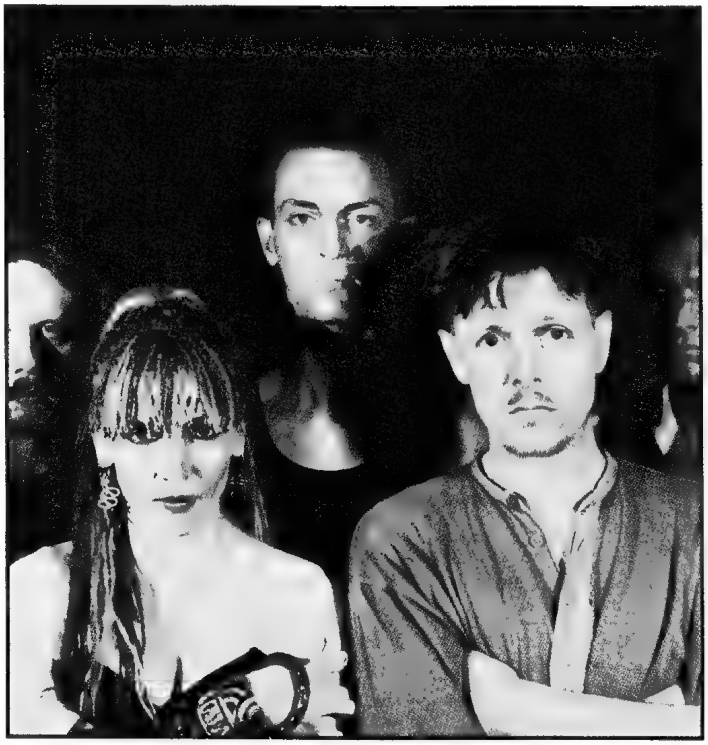
(By the way, if you get the hardback edition, take a look under the dust jacket at the front cover and look at that signature. How baroque can one man be?) ■

REPORT OF EARTH EXPEDITIONARY TEAM YOG-745 (PRE-INVASION RESEARCH FORCE)—S/SGT. TWARP "MOTORHEAD" GRYLPLU REPORTING

It is my sad duty to report that Sgt. Belzarv "Homeboy" Bwrtzz has been relieved of his position as First Researcher to the Chief Anthropologist (Western Popular Music Division) due to his addiction to limited-edition pressings of needle-gouged pink-and-cherry vinyl Psychic TV lps. Sgt. Bwrtzz has been confined to his quarters (as it proved impossible to forcibly separate him from his record collection). Curiously, Bwrtzz never actually plays any of his 6,000+ singles and albums; he just pulls them out and lightly strokes their plastic protective covers, muttering about how much money he could get for each artifact from similarly-affected Earth dwelling record collectors (hereafter referred to as "collector geeks").

I have assumed Sgt. Bwrtzz's duties. Prior to this my area of specialty was Western popular music as sung by English-speaking teenage females (ref. "Lesley Gore," "Debbie Gibson," "Tiffany," "Morrisey"), but having eaten and digested the last seven issues of *Forced Exposure* I feel I now know everything there is to know about underground music (if not syntax or punctuation).

PHOTO BY LAURA LEVINE



The Swans, contemplating matters of God and Man and wondering where the nearest bar can be found.

Following are evaluations of recent vinyl data storage device releases, reviewed in authentic Earth dialect:

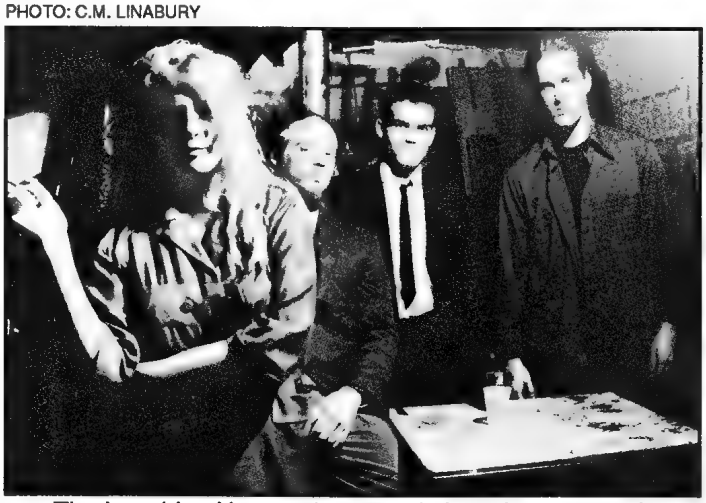
The Soft Boys: Live at the Portland Arms (Glass Fish). A documentation of an all-acoustic show by Robyn Hitchcock's prewar shock-rock combo. Not at all necessary except to collector geeks.

The Peel Sessions (Strange Fruit). Vinyl releases of music broadcast on the John Peel Show on England's Radio 1. Of particular historical interest are cuts recorded during the Golden Age of Punk. These releases seem tailored to collector geeks, as there are now multiple releases of early Peel sessions recorded by groups such as The Damned, Joy Division, and New Order. (A Buzzcocks release is on the way.) Recommended: **The Damned: 11/30/76.** Not to be confused with the previously-released Peel session from 5/10/77. As with the first record, Damned classics such as "Stab Your Back," "New Rose," and "Neat Neat Neat" are superior to the Nick Lowe-produced versions on their first lp. **Joy Division: 11/26/79.** Like the 1/31/79 Peel session, these tracks closely resemble the lp versions. **New Order: 1/26/81.** Another Peel Session from New Order, this one capturing them when they were still Joy Division without Ian Curtis. Includes "I.C.B." and "Truth." **Wire: 1/18/78.** Contains tracks from the *Chairs Missing* period, including "Culture Vultures." Very highly recommended. **That Petrol Emotion: 6/11/85.** Captures the band in their early, raw days. Okay, but for big fans only.

Swans: Children of God (Caroline). A very interesting double album that showcases the group's new direction—rather than let their power attack get monotonous, they intersperse some fragile ballads and generally concentrate a bit more on melody and other possibly antiquated musical notions. Parts of the record sound like Biblical epic soundtrack music.

Laughing Hyenas: Merry-Go-Round (Touch and Go). Band from Ann Arbor, Michigan comprised of vets from L-7 and Negative Approach. Have been compared to the Birthday Party and the Stooges, although I'm reminded of the Flesheaters. In Earth argot, they are "way cool."

PHOTO: C.M. LINABURY



The Laughing Hyenas (apparently less than amused)

Half Japanese: Music to Strip By (50 Skidillion Watts). Excellent album by former primitivists (self-referenced); music now somewhat like Velvet Underground circa *White Light/White Heat*. Regret to say that few will listen to this, despite Half Japanese having musical/conceptual similarity to low-tech rock outfits such as Pussy Galore and Killdozer. Big difference is the absence of rape/murder themes which make the latter bands saleable product to collector geeks and other

lowlife scum vicariously seeking dominance over women.

Dezerter: Music from the Polish Underground (Maximum Rock and Roll). Actually, as my province is Western Popular Music, I shouldn't review this, a record by a Communist Bloc hardcore band. But they're from Poland, which is a Western nation under Eastern control, so we'll include it. The music is what you would expect—loud, fast punk, no musical innovations. Lyrics (helpfully translated on an enclosed lyric sheet) would be trite were they written by an American hardcore band. But they weren't. It's one thing for white upper-middle class children from Nebraska to sing about oppression and another for Polish kids to sing about oppression.

PHOTO BY JOHN BOHNEN

Turn right, go down to the second hallway, turn right again, and it's about three doors down on your left.

Folk Devils: Goodnight Irony lp (Situation Two). Collecting the singles and eps released by this fine (and completely ignored) band before recent, drastic personnel changes wrecked them. The Folk Devils were at their best when they combined their aggressive guitars with sardonic lyrics on songs like "Art Ghetto" and "Hank Turns Blue" (which sounds like a jab at Nick Cave).

The State: False Power (Statement Records). Belated release of tracks recorded in 1983 by an Ann Arbor, Michigan quartet (hence the serious Misfits damage on many tracks). Lyrics center on sociopolitical events of the period, specifically perceived repression of freethinkers by fascistic ruling class.

Gaye Bykers on Acid: Drill Your Own Hole (Caroline). Not as lame as their name, but contains requisite song blaming European problems on capitalism in general and America in particular. In the current British music scene this is about as original and daring a move as an American hardcore band accusing television evangelists of being insincere.

Unrest: Bitter Storm Over Ulm (TeenBeat). The first full-length lp from a good but little-known Washington, DC band draws on a wide variety of musical influences, ranging from hardcore to classical, with sometimes exceptional results.

Shamen: Drop/Christopher Mayhew Says (Moksha). The *Drop* lp has just been released in America. The "Christopher Mayhew" ep is dynamite, mixing plenty of politically-correct anger and aggression with the Shamen's Moody-Blues-With-Chainsaws psychedelic punk sound.

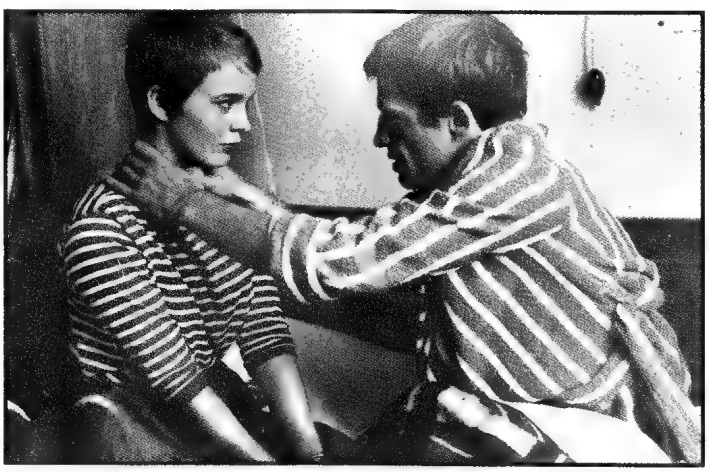
Big Black: Songs About Fucking (Touch and Go)
Prince: Sign O The Times (Paisley Park)
Human sexual dynamics as seen through the eyes of Midwestern men in their 20s. One of them seems to enjoy doing it more than the other.

I also recommend listening to the following records:
The Gun Club: Mother Juno (Fundamental Records).
Live Skull: Dusted lp (Homestead)
Embrace lp (Dischord)
The Defoliants: Hang Ten single (Pravda)
These Immortal Souls: Get Lost (Don't Lie) lp (SST)
Lime Spiders: The Cave Comes Alive lp (Virgin)
Screaming Blue Messiahs: Bikini Red lp (Elektra)

REASONABLY SWELL CDs
New Order: Substance (Qwest): All their eps on two CDs, adding up to something like 140 minutes of music. Contains 12 songs left off the lp version, most of them lots better than the singles stuff on the first disc (for instance, "Hurt" and "In A Lonely Place"). The only drawback is that these are the 12" versions, and in some cases that means overworked dance mixes, particularly the rotten remix of "Subculture."

Angry Samoans: Gimme Samoa (PVC).Thirty-one songs! Sounds great! Politically incorrect lyrics! Wow!

The Jimi Hendrix Experience: Live at Winterland (Rykodisc). This proved to be very enjoyable; a previously-unreleased concert that's been digitally mixed and mastered by a team that knows their craft. What's really amazing is that all of the (apparently 10 zillion) hippies in the audience liked this wailing, wild, very unmellow music. (And his version of "Sunshine of Your Love" is better than the original.)



You play "Peace Train" ONE MORE TIME and I'll twist your head off like a bottle cap, GOT IT?

Robyn Hitchcock: I Often Dream of Trains (Glass Fish): Hard to find and expensive as hell, but quite worth it. Digitally remixed and mastered, this disc contains five non-lp tracks, including the new, superb "I Used To Say I Love You."

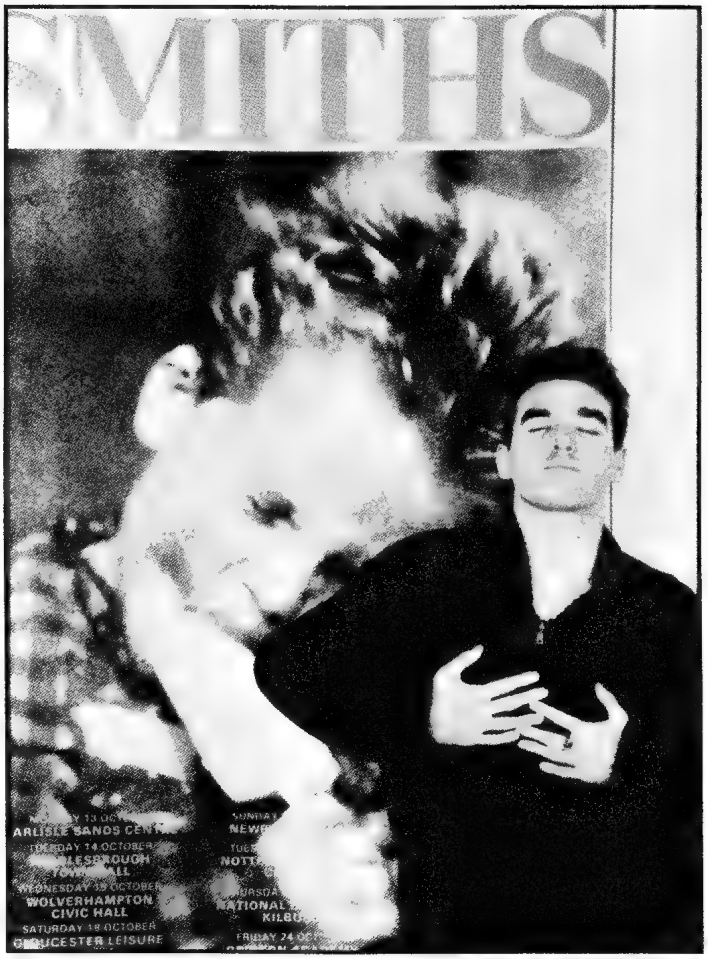
NOT THE ANTICHRIST:
CD is the ideal medium for classical music, where digital recording, mixing and mastering are common and called for. But few rock bands worth listening to have the money to afford going digital, which means that most rock CDs cost much more than lps but don't really sound any better. CDs are here, though, and it doesn't look like they're going the way of the 8-track. And to their credit, CDs aren't all that collectible (boring packages, no color vinyl), which means that they focus more attention on the music itself and *they could make collector geeks obsolete.* For that reason alone we embrace the format. Consequently, in my next report I will review a bunch of CD versions of decent albums (for instance, Wire's *Pink Flag* and *Chairs Missing* are both available on UK discs with extra tracks).

WORST NEW MUSICAL TREND:
Cover versions of insipid '70s pop songs with toxic levels of false sincerity, specifically 10,000 Maniacs' remake of "Peace Train." Jesus, Cat Stevens covers—who's next, Seals and Crofts? The Captain and Tennille? Prediction: R.E.M. will cover "Seasons in the Sun" and sell 5,000,00 copies of the sucker.

THINGS I LEARNED WHILE WATCHING MTV's "120 MINUTES"
Recently while readjusting the fine-tuning on our starcruiser's Audio/Visual Passive Indoctrination Unit (which we use to subtly alter the content and subtext of television programming in order to condition the public for the coming Krell invasion), I stumbled upon MTV's "120 Minutes," which was billed as a "weekly dive into the underground." Promotion for the show promised that for two hours MTV's staid, conservative, at times maddeningly insipid regularly-scheduled fare would make way for some daring sights and sounds.

Following are some of the things I learned about alternative music:

- The Eurythmics are an underground band.
- The Smiths are an underground band. Despite this, Morrisey is often followed through the streets of London by a horde of young boys dressed just like him. Is this reality or just some sort of twisted sexual fantasy? You tell me.
- R.E.M. is an underground band, top-five album notwithstanding.
- Aztec Camera is an underground band, safe-as-milk pop sound notwithstanding.
- Most underground bands record for major record labels, particularly Warner Brothers and its affiliates.
- Love and Rockets not only stole their name from a great comic book, their music utterly blows.
- John Lydon is pretty chubby these days.
- The editor of this magazine could pass for a member of the Jesus and Mary chain, or vice versa.
- Julian Cope has an interesting mike stand that he can crawl all over and climb on and hang off of.
- The Screaming Blue Messiah's "I Wanna Be A Flintstone" video is very well edited.
- Robert Smith is still a pretty cool guy despite wearing makeup and turning into a pop star. But he looked a lot better around the *17 Seconds* period.
- Underground videos, even pseudo-underground videos such as these, feature fewer close-ups of female body parts and less exploitation in general than top-40 videos. ■



Why is this man smiling?

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PETER BAGGE GETS MIFFED

The creator of Neat Stuff *is alive, living in Seattle, and, well...As told to* **Kurt Sayenga**

Peter Bagge is a cartoonist whose drawing style harkens back to the comic book days of *Mad* and whose writing is by turns grossly funny and pointedly cutting. Bagge is a cultural anthropologist digging deep into American suburban life. He is also a very funny guy who's not afraid of going for a cheap laugh. Intellectual cunning and lowbrow comedy—it's an ideal synthesis!

Bagge currently lives in Seattle, Washington (having left New York several years ago, never to return), where he writes and draws the humor magazine *Neat Stuff*, published three times a year by Fantagraphics Books. The magazine is principally sold in direct sales comic book shops, but is often very hard to find. It seems that comic book geeks don't understand satire. Luckily enough, a collection of Bagge's *Neat Stuff* work is slated for release later this year in the nation's bookstores (real bookstores patronized by people who don't move their lips when they read).

Bagge is also known for his long run as editor of *Weirdo* magazine (having been tossed the reins by a weary R. Crumb), where he managed to turn the magazine into a free-for-all showcase for the most twisted, outrageous, and sometimes depraved comics ever published.

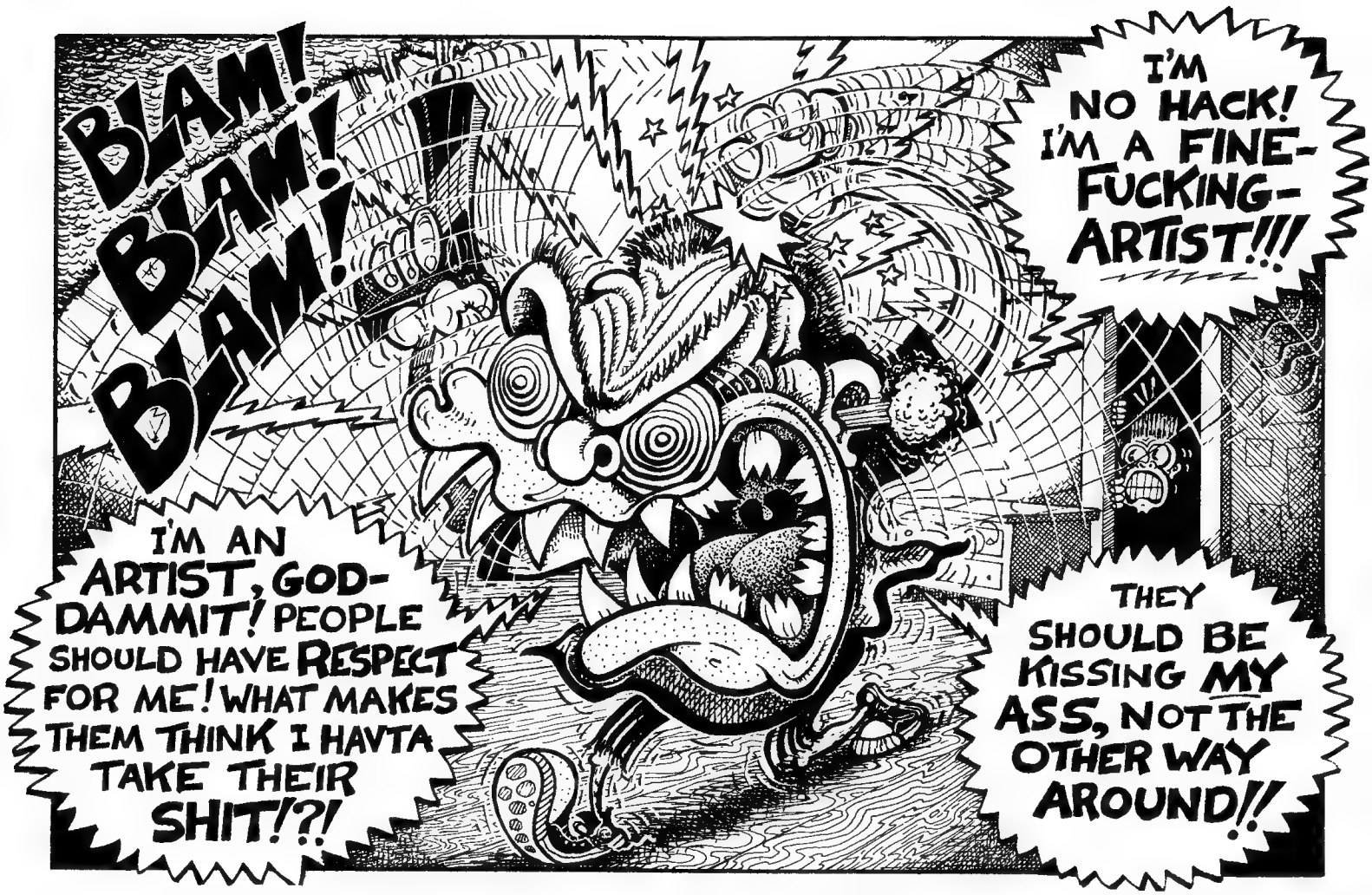
Bagge's work often shocks, but the shock usually come from his keen perception of human relationships and the cruelty everyone is exposed to (and doles out) on a regular basis. Bagge's characters get wildly angry, insanely pissed off, dangerously drunk, murderously angry...but nothing much ever comes of it.

Following are comments Bagge made about, well, all sorts of things:

HE'S REALLY PISSED ABOUT INSIDER TRADING

My characters tend to be small-minded. They never show an awareness of what's really going on in the world. They're not too aware of the big picture. We're all basically aware that we don't have complete control of our lives and where they're going, and that there are people wielding control over our lives.

I don't think anybody completely understands what's going on. I don't. But just the way that people really don't get upset about guys like Ivan Boesky and insider trading—they say, "Well, you know, they had their shot and they took it." They just don't realize that those people were literally, not just in a vague sense, but literally stealing money from them. Even somebody who invests in the stock market says, "Yeah, go for it." He doesn't under-


BAM! BAM! BAM!
I'M NO HACK! I'M A FINE-FUCKING-ARTIST!!!
I'M AN ARTIST, GOD-DAMMIT! PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE RESPECT FOR ME! WHAT MAKES THEM THINK I HAVTA TAKE THEIR SHIT!?!
THEY SHOULD BE KISSING MY ASS, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND!!

No, that's not a Bagge self-portrait, although it does come from an autobiographical story that appeared in *Weirdo* #12. (Cartoonist Ken Weiner is shouting and shooting; Bagge is cowering behind him.) By the way, all art pages 14-19 ©1988 by Peter Bagge. Reprinted by permission.

stand why he, a middle-class guy in Seattle, lost $15,000 in the market. He tells himself that it's just paper, a "paper loss." Yeah, it was paper—paper money, it was paper you could have turned into a car!

For the characters I deal with it's too much of an effort, and it's too painful and too uncomfortable, to think about things like that. They air out their frustrations over small things, like a ball game—and I do that too. I scream and holler like crazy over baseball and football games. I lose my mind over these things that don't mean anything. But it's something you can grasp. Your team lost and you can see why—the guy dropped the ball and he's a fuckin' asshole!

I guess it's a trade-off. People figure they only live once and they won't make their lives a living hell thinking about Ivan Boesky and the CIA. They want to sneak through this life alive and in one piece without getting harrassed by the IRS.

COMIC BOOK GEEKS HATE HIM

I get ideas for characters from people that I know as well as myself. People are always writing in saying, "Oh, I'm like that guy." A story I ran in *Weirdo* called "The Reject" got a very strong response. A lot of these comic collector types—I wish I had some generic term to call them...maybe "The Enemy"—a lot of them were totally freaked out and offended by another story I did in *Weirdo* called "In My Room." It was about a collector freak who stayed in his room and just lived for all that stuff. And I was kind of making fun of myself, because at the time I was almost like a prisoner in my room because of circumstances, and I pretty much lived for the mail. I was learning a lot at the time about old-time movies and old comics and things like that. I was kind of a collector-affi-cionado type, and that can get real crazy. You're no longer a part of real life, you're living for *things*. Apparently there were people who have a real bad case of that and are painfully aware of that but don't want to admit it or can't laugh at it, because I've had people tell me that they know people who were freaked out by the story and thought I was spying on them, because the comic was about them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOZE

Alcohol plays as big a part in my characters' lives as it does in the lives of most of the people I know, who drink pretty often. Just about everybody I know has taken drugs at one time or another, including pot. When I lived in New York pot seemed to have become

WOW! IT'S THAT ISSUE OF FANFARE MAGAZINE I HAD LOST BEFORE I EVER HAD THE CHANCE TO READ IT!
AND IT WAS THREE FEET AWAY FROM ME THE WHOLE TIME!
Fanfare
"...THE MOVIE POSTER ART OF FRANK FRAZETTA"...
MAN, THERE'S SOME GREAT STUFF IN HERE...
THIS IS LIKE FINDING BURIED TREASURE!
HELLO, JIM?... LISTEN, I CAN'T COME OVER TONIGHT, SOMETHING CAME UP... NO I'M NOT LYING!... I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT LATER...
...BY THE WAY, I FOUND THAT COPY OF FANFARE...YEAH...SO I'M SORRY I ACCUSED YOU OF STEALING IT..
...YEAH, RIGHT... SOME OTHER TIME THEN... SEE YA.
...TEACHER'S PET, I WANNA BE TEACHER'S PET...
MAN, FRANK FRAZETTA IS A GENIUS!
WHAT OTHER MILLION-DOLLAR IDEAS!?!
YOU KNOW!! LIKE THAT STUPID GAME!!

Above: Bagge yells at Weiner (again, from *Weirdo* #12). That's Bagge on the right in his pissed-off mode.
Left: "In My Room," from *Weirdo* #13, offended a lot of comic book/pop trash collectors with its cutting study of a fan who has been swallowed up by his own private universe. Bagge says the strip was partly self-parody.
Opposite page: "Kind of an experimental piece" drawn especially for *GREED*.

totally passé; I didn't know anybody that smoked it. Then I came to Washington and realized how, outside of the snotty art crowd I hung out with in New York, pot has become ingrained in American society. So I've been trying to throw that back in.

I almost get embarrassed when I draw a character smoking pot, because I think people will read this and think it's like old underground comix making a joke of people smoking dope, but I put that in there because people, especially kids, smoke it all the time. And there are lots of drunks. You just know that with a character like Studs Kirby alcohol would be a big part of his life.

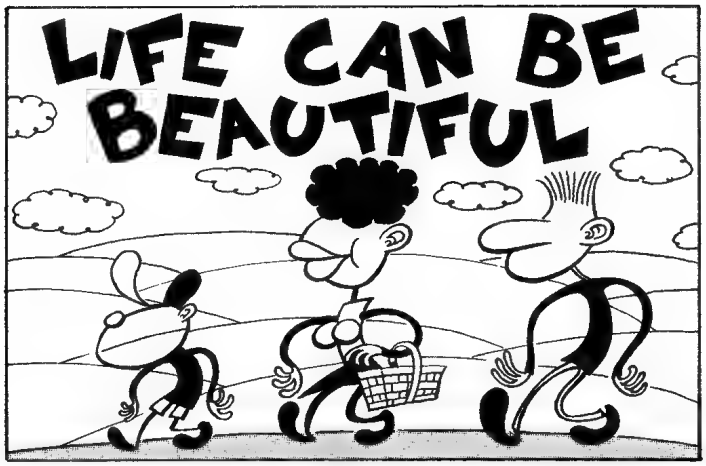
Even a guy who's been tagged as an alcoholic and can't touch it, it still takes up a huge part of his consciousness—thinking of alcohol all of the time, about not being able to drink.

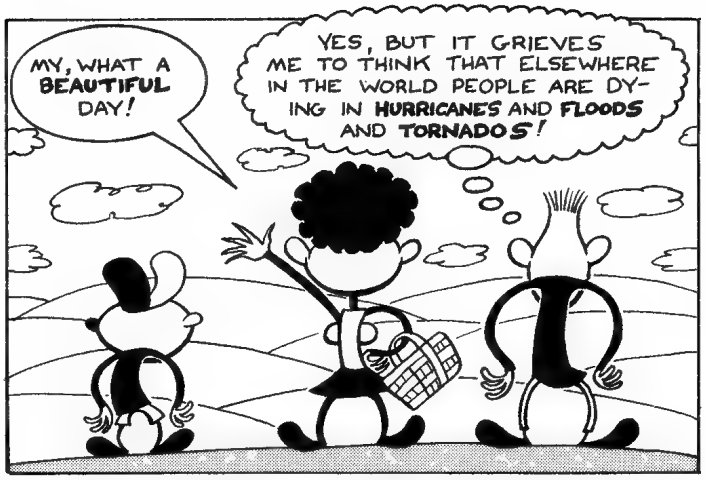
THE *WEIRDO* YEARS

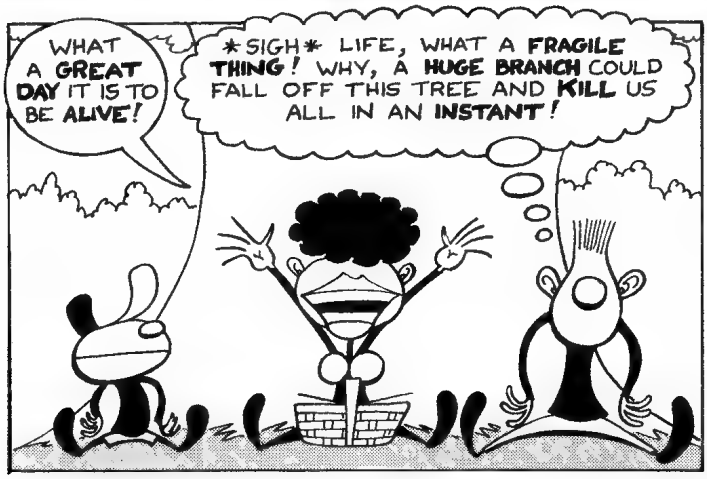
Weirdo was a people's magazine, and I wanted very much to make the people plunking down money for it to feel that it was as much their magazine as mine, and that they could have an effect on the magazine by writing in. Almost everybody that read *Weirdo* was a cartoonist of some type, and I figured reader participation was a good way to get more art in. It took a lot of effort. *Weirdo* was a real pain in the ass to do, for very little money. I would have liked to have stuck with it even longer. I'll always feel guilty about dumping out on *Crumb*. But when I took it over *Neat Stuff* wasn't in sight. I never thought that somebody would want to publish a book of all my work for years. I didn't think (*Neat Stuff* publisher Gary) Groth would be interested in it when he was. At first working on both books didn't seem to have a detrimental effect on *Weirdo*, but the last two *Weirdos* I did I'm not too thrilled with. I realized it was starting to get to be a grind. I wasn't doing anybody a favor by putting out a book that wasn't as good as I thought it could be.

HE'S MAD ABOUT SALES

People who work in comic shops definitely seem to have their mind made up about what they like and don't like, and what they tend not to like is a humor book along the lines of *Neat Stuff*. The only kind of humor book that seems to sell are these spoofs that really aren't even funny. There are millions of spoofs of *Dark Knight*, and they aren't even satires. Whatever laughter they elicite is based on familiarity—knowing that you're not the only jerk out there who remembers every panel of *Dark Knight*. That's




MY, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DAY!
YES, BUT IT GRIEVES ME TO THINK THAT ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD PEOPLE ARE DYING IN HURRICANES AND FLOODS AND TORNADOS!


WHAT A GREAT DAY IT IS TO BE ALIVE!
SIGH LIFE, WHAT A FRAGILE THING! WHY, A HUGE BRANCH COULD FALL OFF THIS TREE AND KILL US ALL IN AN INSTANT!

RYE OR WHOLE WHEAT?
WHOLE WHEAT.
HOW CAN I ENJOY EATING ALL THIS DELICIOUS FOOD KNOWING PEOPLE ARE STARVING ALL OVER THE WORLD!

C'MON EVERYBODY! LET'S PLAY CATCH!
OKAY!
YES, LET US PLAY NOW WHILE WE STILL CAN, FOR SOMEDAY WE'LL ALL BE TOO OLD AND CRIPPLED WITH ARTHRITIS!

©1987 by PETER BAGGE

♫ I'M SORRY ♫
...SO SORRY... ♫
PLEASE ACCEPT MY
O-POL-O-GEE!...
♫
#15
LISTEN TO THAT VOICE... INCREDIBLE!
SHE HAD THAT CERTAIN "SOMETHING"... STILL DOES, S'FAR AS I'M CONCERNED!
BOWSER, LIZZEN TO THIS RECORD... DON'T PASS OUT ON ME YOU STUPID MUTT!
...LAST TIME I SAW HER PERFORM LIVE, MAN... INCREDIBLE!
SHE'S AN INCREDIBLE PERFORMER!
...BEST SHOW I EVER SAW... I THINK...
... SAW HER IN VEGAS... TWICE!...
SZNARRKK...

"'Studs Kirby Gets Drunk By Himself' (from *Neat Stuff* #2) came out well, Bagge says, "although I'm disappointed in the drawing. I started out with a certain style in mind and as I drew I seem to have lost track of what I had in mind. I look at it now and I get irritated by some of the choices I made. Anything I did more than a year ago I look at and cringe."

what they consider humor. They're afraid of *Neat Stuff*.

We assumed sales would start at a low level and grow, but they've stayed pretty much at the same level throughout. I've been very frustrated by this, because recently the demand for *Neat Stuff* has been greater than ever. Two weeks after an issue comes out, Fantagraphics and I are swamped with letters from people complaining that they can't find it.

MAD? HE'S STEAMED!

You go into a comic shop and you'll see the sales guy sitting there reading a comic book, and that's what he does all day, or else he's in some long bullshit conversation about who's better, this jerk or that jerk. But when I worked in a bookstore, if I wasn't serving customers or cleaning up I was doing inventory, inventory, seeing how many copies sold of every single fucking little paperback. These guys don't do that. They ordered 10 copies of *Neat Stuff* three years ago that took two months to sell, and now they order 10 and they sell out in a day. What does that tell a smart person? That they should order 20 or 30. But they don't, because they're not keeping track of it. They just look at it and take a guess, and they're stuck with that guess for three years.

BUT THERE MIGHT BE HOPE

Groth is trying hard to get his books into magazine racks and bookstores. He's also trying to get trade paperback comics collections into bookstore chains. So they're coming out with a "Best of *Neat Stuff*." This book reprints pretty much everything from the first five issues, which are all out of print. The book should sell a fair amount to the direct sales comics market, since it collects material that people are trying to get hold of now, and Groth's also trying to package it in a way that it will appeal to someone who's never seen it before and comes across it in a bookstore. And that's pretty much what we edited out—things that might not go over too well with that crowd. Now we've got a whole new set of prejudices to deal with—what the bookstore dealers like and don't like.

HOLLYWOOD SLEAZEBAGS

Everybody gets approached (by Hollywood) sooner or later. God forbid people in Hollywood should have to come up with their own ideas. The *Love and Rockets* guys have been approached a lot too, and it's never worked out. They come real close to signing contracts, but sooner or later

HOW 'BOUT YOU, DUDE! YOU AFRAID OF HARD-CORE, TOO?
IT'S ALRIGHT, SOME OF IT... AND STOP CALLING ME "DUDE".
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL YOU, "WILMA"? WHAT ARE YOU SO UPTIGHT ABOUT, HUH?! ARE YOU SCARED OF ME? HMM? DUDE?!
JEEZUS KEE-RYST! THIS GUY'S A LUNATIC!
CALM DOWN, M.B. WE'RE PLAYING YOUR TAPE NOW, SO RELAX AND BE HAPPY.
...BOMB THE RUSSIANS, BOMB THE RUSSIANS...
HEY WILMA, YOU GOT A LOT OF ZITS, DID YOU KNOW THAT?
NO, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT. THANKS FOR POINTING THAT OUT TO ME, MONSTER BRAINS!
YEAH, THAT ONE ON YOUR CHEEK IS A BIG MOTHERFUCKER. I BET IF I PUNCHED IT IT WOULD HURT LIKE HELL, DON'T YOU THINK?
YOU THINK SO, HUH? WELL WHY DON'T YOU TRY IT AND FIND OUT?
HUH?
HA! HA! YEAH, WHY DON'T YOU PUNCH IT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS?
AAAH, I WOULD, BUT I DON'T FEEL LIKE GETTING ZIT JUICE ALL OVER ME! AIN'T WORTH IT, MAN... FUCKIN' ZIT JUICE... FUCK IT...
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH...

From *Neat Stuff* #9: Hapless All-American Teen Buddy Bradley meets a speedmetal-loving "sheep in wolf's clothing." Says Bagge, "A friend of mine manages a speedmetal band, and he gave me their record and it drove me up the wall. These guys are trying to get heavy in their lyrics, but they want it both ways. They do a song called 'Rape' which says overtly 'rape is bad, it's disgusting, why do you do it.' But at the same time the singer's describing a really gory violent brutal rape in detail."

in each contract they find hidden in a sneaky way a clause that will steal the rights to the characters away from them. First they get a contract that spells it out blatantly, and they'll say, "Forget it." Then the (movie people) come back with a more cleverly-worded version, and they keep burying it deeper and deeper, but it's always in there somewhere and they always have to reject it.

That guy (Ralph) Bakshi (director of "Fritz the Cat" and "Wizards") called me up once and just brown-nosed me for an hour. It was the most suspicious thing in the world, telling me I'm one of the new greats and blah blah blah and how he wanted to make a cartoon out of one of my comics and he'd draw up a contract. He was doing the same exact thing with Drew Friedman (artist of nasty celebrity parodies). It was supposed to be some TV project. Of course I never heard from the guy again, not a peep.

GIRLY-GIRL, CHUCKIE-BOY, AND HIPPIE PUNKS

I guess you could describe Girly-Girl's relationship with Chuckie Boy as "she's the punk and he's the hippie." Generalizations about the philosophies of both are encapsulated in those two characters, and the conflict between the two of them would be the conflict between a hippie and a punk, which was much more pronounced when punk first came out. Now, especially out here in Seattle, there's no difference. Seattle is a real nice, comfortable, slow-moving city. What is there to be a punk about in Seattle? Every person I've met dressed as a punk here have been sheep in wolves' clothing. They're hippies who don't want to look outdated and be made fun of. Although now that's kind of switched back, now they've decided they won't be made fun of if they dress like hippies, so they're all dressed like hippies again.

I get a lot of punkzines in the mail, and some of them are really a scream. It all depends on the editor. But I just can't keep up with underground music now; a lot of it really doesn't do anything for me. Like combining punk rock and metal—yeah, they combined the two, but uh...who does it benefit? It seems like heavy metal has adopted some of the punk poses because it gets people a little more pissed off than what they were doing. But it's all watered down.

BUT, HEY, FOLKS

I grew up in the suburbs, in a town about 40 miles north of New York City. I'm just a typical guy. ■

THAT PETROL EMOTION

A little talk with bandleader Sean O'Neill about music, politics, the politics of music, and a few other things. Interview conducted by ***Anne Chervinsky, Kurt Sayenga, and Bert Quieroz.***
Photographs by ***Bert Querioz and Amy Pickering***

"We were looking for a harder, harsher sound than the Undertones, a response to the way music has totally regressed. It's probably worse than it was before punk came along. As fans of music, we're disgusted by that."

That Petrol Emotion are: Lead guitarist Sean O'Neill, one-time principal songwriter for the magnificent punk pop band the Undertones; lead guitarist Raemann O'Gormain; Damian O'Neill, the Undertones' lead guitarist, now That Petrol Emotion's bass player; drummer Ciaran McLaughlin; and singer Steve Mack. The band has released two albums, *Manic Pop Thrill* and *Babble*, as well as a handful of eps worth seeking out, especially their second, "V-2." Their latest (non-lp) single, "Genius Move," is available now through Virgin Records.

Radically varying their songs and their sound from track to track on their records (from raging guitar freakouts to funk to fragile ballads), the band keeps things fresh musically, avoiding the sonic monotony that many one-trick bands on the current scene fall prey to.

Although the band would prefer to be known for their music (they describe themselves as "just a pop group"), That Petrol Emotion's Irish Republican politics are a highly-noticeable part of the band's image. The group's songs are not overtly political (problems are confronted more on an emotional than an intellectual level, music being an emotional medium), but all their record sleeves carry information about some aspect of the struggle for Irish independence.

That Petrol Emotion has yet to achieve the mass success they deserve (the biggest selling band on Virgin is the Cutting Crew, further proof of the perversity of the universe), but they are doing relatively well. During the Washington stop of their long tour (stretching from April to November) the band stayed at the Mayflower Hotel, one of the better flophouses in the nation's capital. Following is an interview with Sean O'Neill, a very gracious fellow who tore himself away from his wife and child to chat over coffee at a local diner.

GREED: What's the question you get asked most in interviews?

O'NEILL: Usually people want to know the history of the group, how we formed. Everybody always asks that even though we've said it so many times in our interviews. Most of the interviewers have heard of us and most have read interviews by us, and most of us have read how we started in the first place—I dunno.

A lot of people seem to think it was me and Damian who formed the group after the Undertones broke up, which is ridiculous. When I went back to Ireland I was working in a factory for a while; I was done with music as far as I was concerned. It was me and Reamann formed the band. Everybody else came in afterward.

GREED: The Undertones moved from energetic, driving

pop on the early records to soul on their last album. That Petrol Emotion seems closer to the spirit of the early Undertones records, but with much more of an edge and a denser sound.

O'NEILL: In the Undertones I wrote songs on guitar, too, and it's hard to get away when you write songs on guitar to try and put it in some other context as well. When me and Reamann formed the band, we listened to Pere Ubu, Captain Beefheart, the Cramps—all kinds of guitar-oriented things in the first place. Pop music can't go on the way it was before punk happened, overproduced and bland and ultraslick—we just wanted to be an alternative to that.

GREED: Are you finding an audience in Europe?

O'NEILL: No, we're just as underground. In London we can probably pull a couple thousand people, but anywhere else it's an average of 400, 500 people. *Babble* hasn't sold any more than *Manic Pop Thrill* has, even though *Babble*'s out on a major label. So we're still pretty underground.

GREED: Then again, since the band jumped from Polydor to Virgin Records right after *Babble* was released, Polydor isn't really giving *Babble* any support.

O'NEILL: That doesn't help, but the "Genius Move" single (their first on Virgin) bombed in England—it sold, like, 10 copies. So we're still unknown.

GREED: Well, that really stinks.

O'NEILL: That's just the way things are. At least we're lucky we're signed to a major. We can get a wage out of it, at least. Other bands we know on independents have to work as well, which is crazy. We're a bit luckier than that.

GREED: You're living off the band right now?

O'NEILL: Just a bit. But we're doing what we enjoy, that's the main thing for us.

GREED: How did you come to live in London, given that so many of your songs are about Ireland, its people and its politics?

O'NEILL: Well, me and Reamann played in Ireland for a while, just the two of us and a drum machine. We were also doing this club, an alternative disco we had every week. At the start it was okay, we were getting maybe a hundred people each time, and we were playing Pere Ubu, Captain Beefheart, and tough pop and soul, a wide kind of alternative thing. That was during the summer, then all the students went back to the University. It lasted another two months, and we were playing to 30 people. It was just frustrating, y'know, nobody gives a damn there. We were trying out various people, looking for singers and drummers, and there was nobody there we wanted, so we decided to just move over to London. We'd be closer to seeing bands and get ideas

PHOTO BY BERT QUIEROZ

The family man's band: Sean O'Neill (far right) and Ciaran McLaughlin discuss investment strategies backstage with their significant others. Below: Ciaran searches for the Business section of the *New York Times.*

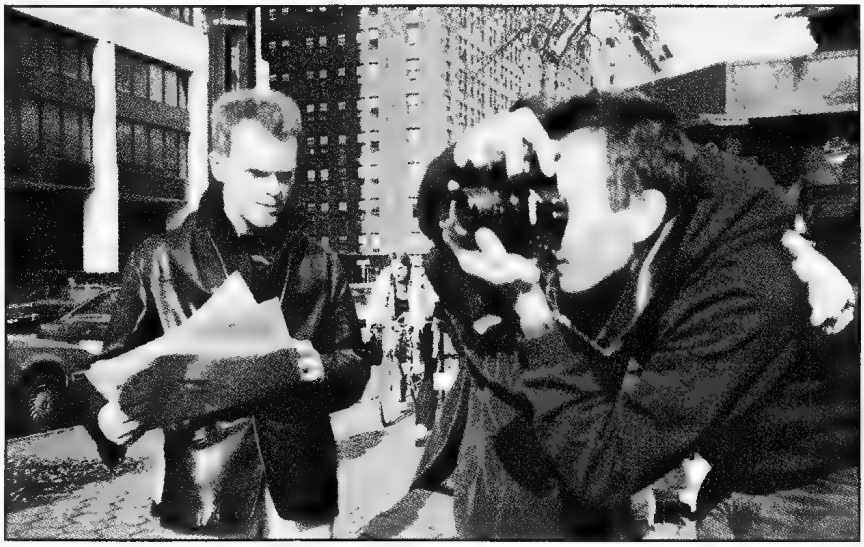


PHOTO BY AMY PICKERING

"We didn't really have enough time when we were recording *Babble*, and a few songs suffered because of that. Next time we won't make the same mistake. The next lp is going to be a lot more diverse than *Babble* is, closer to *Manic Pop Thrill.*"

from that, and I would get more access to buy records, as well. Also, maybe from an Irish point of view, I'd get more objective if I left. And that's happened. The more we search for information to put on the sleeves—the more books we've read—the more extreme we've gotten, the more Irish Republican-oriented we've gotten—I've gotten, anyway.

GREED: Have you had problems being Irish living in England?

O'NEILL: As a group, never so far, although we write about the Troubles; so far it's all been really positive things. The people whose addresses we've put on the sleeves have told us they've been getting barraged with people wanting information, so that's good. But as an Irish person living in England, you're treated as a second-class person. You're a step above colored people, but every now and then racism does show itself in different forms.

In a music group, the people you meet are usually more open to other people and ideas, so it's not as bad as if we were working in an ordinary job, as some of our friends are. At work, they'll have people talking down to them and treating them like shit. We don't notice that individually ourselves so much.

GREED: There's an obvious difference between *Manic Pop Thrill* and *Babble*. *Manic Pop Thrill* has more contrast between sweet pop songs and aggression.

O'NEILL: I would have liked to have had a bit more time to record *Babble*, to have a few more songs written. Like, for example, if we had had a bit more time "Genius Move" would have been on *Babble*. We wanted to go for a harder, tougher sound. That's why we picked Roli Mosimann (to produce *Babble*); we'd heard stuff he's done with the Young Gods and with Wiseblood, and that seemed perfect. And we wanted to learn how to use drum machines. We bought a sampler and wanted to get Roli to tape samples and things. As it turned out, Roli has a completely different way he approaches recording, say compared to (*Manic Pop Thrill* producer) Hugh Jones. It took about a week just to get the drum sounds—he's really meticulous about things. That's one of the reasons we don't really want to use him for the next lp—it just took too long. We prefer to be a bit more spontaneous when we're recording.

We didn't really have enough time when we were recording *Babble*, and a few songs suffered because of that. Next time we won't make the same mistake. The next lp is going to be a lot more diverse than *Babble* is, closer to *Manic Pop Thrill*.

GREED: Did Roli have a lot of influence on the band aside from recording procedure?

O'NEILL: No, I don't think so. He's just far more technical. We want to use the sampler more anyway on the next lp. On *Babble* we were supposed to use it more, but we didn't get enough time to think about ways to use it.

PHOTO BY AMY PICKERING

Steve Mack, the band's token American, argues that the new tax law offers ample profit opportunities to those willing to invest in Money Market CDs.

"As an Irish person living in England, you're treated as a second-class person. You're a step above colored people, but every now and then racism does show itself in different forms."

GREED: Unlike most bands that release great first albums, your second album was a success as well. Often a promising band's second album is rotten. Maybe that was because of your previous band experience...

O'NEILL: It's probably because all the people in the group were writing songs after *Manic Pop Thrill*, and they are now, too. Ciaran has written nearly all the new songs, including "Genius Move," and a really funk-oriented song we recorded at the same time but weren't happy with called "Groove Check," and that's almost a James Brown type of thing.

GREED: You use a drum machine live at times, and at one show this summer Steve was playing keyboards.

O'NEILL: Yeah, through the sampler. We just use the drum machine on "Big Decision" and "Creeping to the Cross" so far. We want to use it more and more. The people we want to approach for the next lp are Curtis Mayfield and Brian Eno. We want to use both of them for different songs rather than stick to one producer. Both of them might say no, we don't know yet. We want someone who will arrange the songs, who will have

ideas for songs. Someone like Curtis Mayfield working on our dance-orientated songs would be perfect. Then for our weirder side—Ciaran's got songs a bit like Sonic Youth, for example—someone like Eno would be perfect for ideas.

GREED: I wonder how much Eno charges?

O'NEILL: Well, one thing we want to make sure is that we don't sound anything like U2. I'm thinking more of "Blank Frank" or anything off of *Here Come The Warm Jets*.

GREED: You've been touring so much that you must have seen a lot of opening bands—do you recommend any up and comers?

O'NEILL: Well, in America it's been terrible. We really didn't have any idea of who to pick, so every band we've had so far has been dreadful. But in England a group called Yargo from Manchester did our last tour with us, and they were fantastic. We played with the Young Gods a couple of times. Slab is a group with a single called "Smoke Rings" that I thought was a brilliant record. Stump have signed with a major; they played with us a year and a half ago and I thought they were really fantastic. So there are a few bands, but not as many as there should be.

GREED: Is Salem 66 playing with you throughout the US?

O'NEILL: They've been playing on most of the tour. Steve really likes them—he's actually been doing their sound for them. But I...they're really nice people, and it's terrible to slag them off, but they're totally boring, really.

GREED: You were supposed to come around a year ago. Was it true that you couldn't get into the country?

O'NEILL: No. It was more the promoters here, they kept fobbing us off, saying there would be no interest if we came over so there's no point doing it. So we ended up touring Europe.

GREED: That's interesting, because I'm sure I read that you were barred from entering the country because of your politics.

O'NEILL: No, we've not had any trouble that way. I guess New Model Army had that trouble, and we would have been obvious choices, but no, there's been nothing like that. Actually, not letting in New Model Army showed good taste, I think.

(Sean flips through GREED #3.)

O'NEILL: Oh, you've met Sonic Youth. I've seen them three times, and the first time was the most amazing thing I've ever seen, and that was in a small club in London. The second time was at a country club, and I was really disappointed in them there. Then we played with them at a festival in Denmark, and it was just incredible.

This tour so far, I'm having a great time when we play. Traveling a lot can be really tiring, but the fact that we've played for this long, since *Babble* was released, we've played some of the best we've ever played. At this stage I thought we'd be so tired that we'd just go through the motions, but it's been the opposite. We're hoping to get a chance to play a new song by Ciaran tonight that we've never done before. It's exciting.

GREED: Is the British government giving you any problems because of the political messages on your sleeves?

O'NEILL: No, probably because we're still not very well known. England Radio One, which is the ultra-conservative BBC, devotes a regular 15-minute section of the news to pop music, and Steve and Damian were on it, and the whole thing was asking about the Diplock Courts. It was great for propaganda. They're ignorant to what's going on in the first place—that's my theory anyway. They don't have any idea. The fact that we can slip all these things in is just perfect, really. But at the same time, on "Genius Move" we've got a quote from Liam Mellows taken from Gerry Adams' book *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, and everybody knows who Gerry Adams is; if they don't know anything else they know who he is. The B-side of "Genius Move" is a session we did for Radio One, and (a Radio One executive) wanted to get the sleeve, and we think that was the first time anyone at Radio One ever got the sleeves. And "Genius

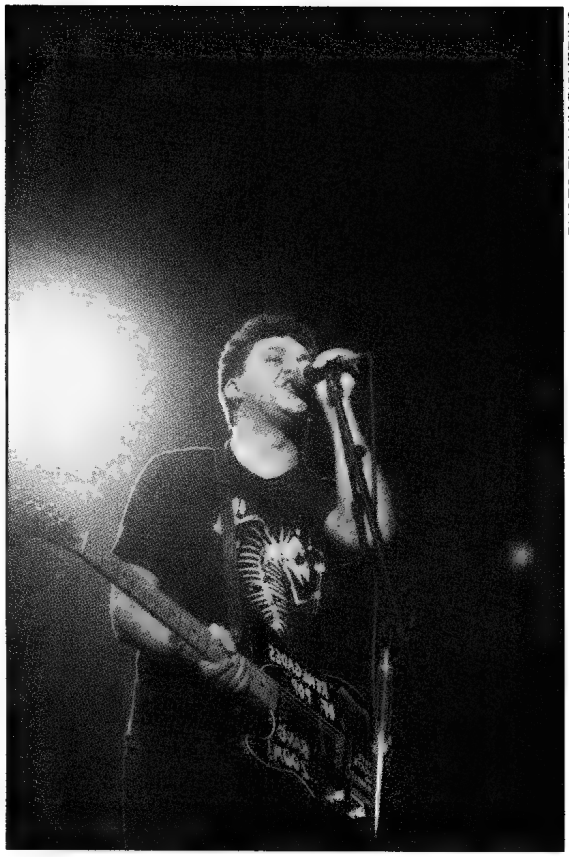


PHOTO BY AMY PICKERING

Raemann O'Gormain argues that Money Market CDs are sucker bets in lieu of the stock market crash. "Go into gold," he urges the crowd, "Or keep all your money in your mattress."

"New Model Army had trouble (gaining entrance to the US), and we would have been obvious choices, but no, there's been nothing like that. Actually, not letting in New Model Army showed good taste, I think."

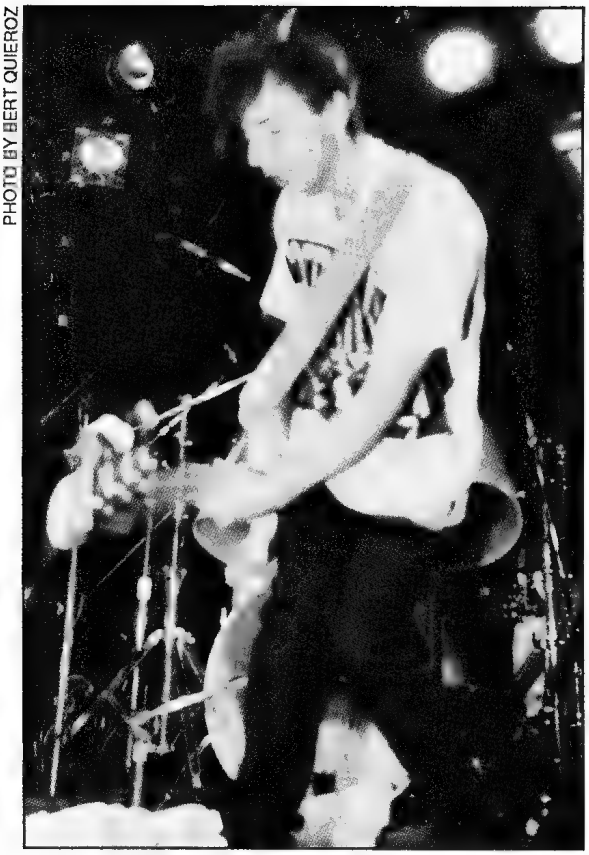


PHOTO BY BERT QUIEROZ

Damian O'Neill, sometimes referred to as "the cute one," (although you wouldn't know it by this picture) is far too absorbed in the problem of the hermaneutic circle to pay heed to the band's debate on economics.

"A lot of interviews we've done, all they've asked about is the politics. We're getting so fed up just talking about the politics and not the music, but obviously we have to."

Move" wasn't played at all. So we're now wondering whether they've caught on to the fact that we're doing this. Maybe we're just getting paranoid, but...

GREED: The politics don't really shine overtly in the songs.

O'NEILL: Yeah, that's true. It's not that intentional. We write songs just the way they come out. I can't sit down and say, "I have to write about this specific thing." "Genius Move" might not be about anything political, but we can put something on the sleeves just to inform people and, if they're interested, let them find out about it, rather than ram it down people's throats all the time. We try and keep that balanced. The music comes first. As to whether we can change anything, we don't know, but we feel obliged at least to mention what's going on in Ireland. That's really important. I was talking to some people at a bookstore in Detroit who were really disappointed that I didn't mention anything over the mike at the show about the IRA, that we just played songs. It was hard to explain that most people are there to enjoy themselves—they don't really want someone to rant and rave about what the British are doing in Ireland. If they like us and enjoy us they'll buy the records, and then they'll read about this, and that seems a more intelligent way of doing it.

GREED: Do you notice Americans picking up your record and finding out more about what's going on in Ireland? A lot of Americans are pretty ignorant about what's going on over there.

O'NEILL: Well, a lot of interviews we've done, all they've asked about is the politics. We're getting so fed up just talking about the politics and not the music, but obviously we have to. Most people I've talked to after shows just talk about the music.

GREED: I was wondering how you get your sound—it's so hot and thunderous.

O'NEILL: We just turn the amps up, y'know? I guess it's just the fact that we've been playing for so long together. It's not something we've worked at; it just happened.

GREED: So you don't owe it all to one magic effects pedal.

O'NEILL: Naw, it just comes out that way. We try to keep things as spontaneous as possible. And everybody has a wide taste in music, as well; we're all similar that way. We're always wanting to hear something, somebody new. We're still like fans that way, and that's one of the things that got us in the group. We were looking for a harder, harsher sound than the Undertones, a response to the way music has totally regressed. It's probably worse than it was before punk came along. As fans of music, we're disgusted by that.

GREED: Your songs are very catchy but always have an edge to them. Your choice of covers is interesting, too, like Bohannon's "Dance Your Ass Off."

O'NEILL: Well, we weren't really happy with that, but it was such a great song....We ran out of time with that. We should have done that better. It took us three weeks to do *Manic Pop Thrill*, and we thought we could do *Babble* in five weeks, and in actual fact it took us seven weeks. We could have used another three weeks. I think it's a great lp overall, though. It'll still sound good in a year's time. That's always a test, if a record sounds good three or four years later. "Big Decision" is probably the best song on it—the most time was spent on that song, and I think it shows.

GREED: Did you intend for that to be the single when you recorded it?

O'NEILL: We knew it was an obvious candidate, kind of catchy. "Creeping to the Cross" is something that Roli helped with the drum machines and all the effects, and we thought he would have been able to do that with two or three other songs, but as it turned out there wasn't the time. Songs like "Static" we never do live now, and that could have been better if we had time. But for its faults, it's a good record anyway.

GREED: You're going in to record next spring?

O'NEILL: I hope we are, but at the same time we don't want to be rushed into doing it. The next lp is really important.

GREED: The record company must be pressing you, especially since you just signed...

O'NEILL: I don't feel any pressure at all. And the fact that we want to use Eno and Curtis Mayfield, that's probably going to cost a lot of money, too. I don't think we're going to get any hassle there. Maybe the fact that there's nothing going on now, there's nothing new, and if they can get Curtis Mayfield and us it could be really interesting. I think the record company sees that. That's why we signed to Virgin—they seem really open to ideas and want to try something different.

GREED: How did it happen that you've been bouncing off all these labels?

O'NEILL: When we first went to England, Creation said they'd give us the money to record a single. Then when we actually got over there they started getting cold feet. At that time Pink came in and put out "Keen," which didn't do very well. Pink wasn't sure if they wanted to give us more money for another single, so we decided, fuck it, we'll spend the money we've saved and put it on our own label through Rough Trade—that was "V2." We sent the singles and a demo to major companies and they were all turning us down, giving us half-hour lectures on why we'll never make it. The guy who'd been getting us bookings in London knew the people at Demon, and they really liked us, so they gave us the money to record *Manic Pop Thrill*, which was all they could afford. There were three singles off of that, but they couldn't afford to promote them. We felt we were a singles group as well, and we wanted a chance to get airplay if we could, so we knew we had to get on a major label.

Manic Pop Thrill sold about 30,000, which was a lot for an independent label, and it was number one in the independent charts for about six weeks and got fantastic press. So the majors had to take notice, reluctantly. After that we were approached by nearly every major. Polydor at that time seemed the best; the managing director was really enthusiastic and said he'd give us four lps or whatever it takes to grow. Then after we recorded *Babble* the managing director got an offer and left the company, and a guy from EMI replaced him, a real typical businessman, the sort of person who plays Whitesnake B-sides, y'know? We had a meeting and he started giving us bullshit about how *Babble* was selling and how we had to justify being in his company and all this crap. It was like the same old business crap the Undertones had with Warner Brothers and EMI. Then luckily enough Polydor's legal department slipped up on the contract. They were supposed to pick up the option for the next lp and they forgot to, so legally we could leave the company when we wanted to. So we went to Virgin. The managing director owns shares of Virgin, so he's always going to be there, and he's a nice guy, like the guy we met originally at Polydor, and he really wanted to sign us. The people at Virgin are younger, and they're music fans for a change as well, not '60s hippies like most record company people seem to be, old men with hair down to their shoulders pretending they're 25.

GREED: Do you mind talking about the Undertones?

O'NEILL: I don't mind now. Originally it wasn't fair to the other people in the group; we always try to play that down.

GREED: You can see some similarities between the Undertones and That Petrol Emotion. Since you were their principal songwriter that could be expected.

O'NEILL: I wrote "Natural Kind of Joy" before the Undertones broke up, and some of the songs I've written since then could have been Undertones songs.

GREED: What's your favorite Undertones record?

O'NEILL: My favorite lp is *Positive Touch*, which has the best songs I'd ever written up to that time. A lot of the early stuff, I can't even listen to some of the words. I haven't listened to the records in years and years.

GREED: How old were you when the Undertones started?

O'NEILL: 18, and I'm 30 now. Pretty old. ■

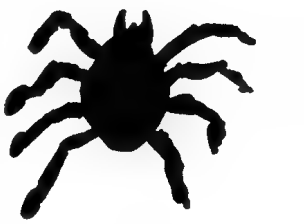
PHOTO BY AMY PICKERING

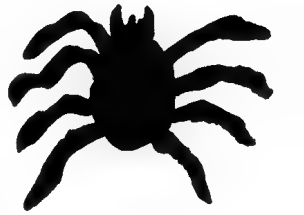
Unable to resolve their differences over global economic policy or personal investment futures, Sean and Raemann turn their backs and take out their frustrations on their guitars.

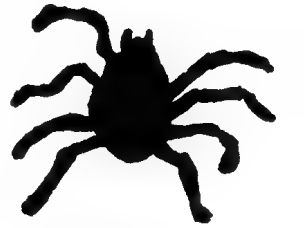
"Most record company people seem to be old men with hair down to their shoulders pretending they're 25."

An unedited transcript assembled by Sydney Carton

WHACK "Auuuuggh!" "So tell us about the Lime Spiders." "I don't know nothin' about no Lime—" WHACK WHACK "Arrrgggghhh!" "You want I should refresh your memory a little more?" "No, I—" "Refresh his memory a little more, Sergeant." WHACKAWHACKA POW POW POW "Aieeee!" "Tell us about the Lime Spiders. Tell us about this conversation you had with this guy, the leader..." "Blood..." "Ohh, poor little baby." "Pipe down! Blood's the name of the leader of the band. Mick Blood, or so he calls himself. Come on, kid, spill. We can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way." "Okay! Okay...Yeah, I talked to him, I talked to Mick Blood. I...I dunno. It was about three in the morning in Australia when I finally got a hold of him and he was tired and his voice was shot to hell. He really lays it on when he sings. I dunno, he really didn't say anything new..." "Well, maybe it's new to us, kid. Come on, start at the beginning." "The Lime Spiders are a hot Australian band that do a modern take on the '60s garage punk style. They've changed lineups about a million times, especially guitar players. When they started out in '79 Mick Blood himself was on guitar." "On guitar? I thought he was just the singer!" "Well, he is now, and he writes a lot of their original material, but he used to play guitar. He told me he stopped because he likes to leave it to the experts." "He said that?" "Yeah. Leave it to the experts. Jeez, you just about knocked my tooth out, you know that?" "Pipe down, you runt, or you'll be lookin' out of two glass eyes!" "Shaddup and let him talk! Go ahead, kid." "Yeah, well, the band just sort of started and stopped a lot, always breaking up or just not doing anything. In 1981 Richard Jakimyszyn, a great guitar player, came into the band and that's when Blood said it started to take off, that they developed their sound. Mostly they did covers of classic stuff like "1-2-5." Their first single, '25th Hour,' was a two-7" set released in 1983 on Green Records. Like just about everything the Spiders released before their first lp, it's a classic." "A classic. What the hell does that mean, a classic?" "Uhh, chief, I think Webster's defines it as 'of the highest class, being a model of its kind, excellent, standard, authoritative.' Does dat help?" "SHAAADUP, YOU BIG MAHROON!" WHAAAAP "What are you hittin' *me* for?" "Because you're the suspect, that's why! Now come on, '25th Hour' single, a classic, come on..." "Well, in 1984 they released the 'Slave Girl' single on Citadel, which a lot of people think is the best thing they've ever done. It's just a horrendously great single, blazing guitars and screeching vocals with what starts out as a sexist lyric and turns inside out. Around that time they picked up Gerard Corben on guitar, who, along with Jakimyszyn, came in and out of the band. Now he's their permanent guitarist, I guess. They've had dual-guitar setups that I've heard were really great, maybe better than the lineup now, but I dunno. Blood, of course, thinks the band as it is now is the best one, or at least that's what he says. He told me the band hasn't really changed lineups that much, but that's a crock of shit." WHAAACKWHAACK-WHAAACK "No swearin' when you're in the presence of a police officer, you wormy little son of a bitch!" "Okay, okay! Well, in 1985 they released the 'Out of Control' single on Citadel, which is my personal favorite. Both sides will make your ears bleed, they're so good and so powerful. They recorded another single called 'Weirdo Libido' that was pretty good but basically a rewrite of 'Slave Girl.' Then they broke up, sort of." "Yeah, this is the part we're curious about. What gives? Didn't Blood kind of wander around Europe or something while the others guys formed a new band?" "Something like that. Anyway, they got approached by Virgin, who maybe didn't know the situation, and the next thing you know 'Weirdo Libido' is released and the band is in a recording studio cutting their first album, *The Cave Comes Alive.* It has some pretty good tracks, although some of it, well, I don't know—" "Get to the point!" "Well, it's a very heavy sounding record. Maybe too heavy. I asked Blood about it and he said he wasn't entirely happy with the production, admitting that the album doesn't have the same level of ferocity as their early record-







ings. They're looking around for a new producer now. Still, although he doesn't think it's perfect, Blood's pretty much satisfied with the album because of the diversity of the material on it. Up 'till now the Lime Spiders have been known pretty much exclusively for their '60s punk sound, but this record throws a few curves. It sounds too heavy to me, though, kind of lumbering in spots, which their singles never were. They were a jagged, hard-edge band. Maybe one of the worst-dressed bands around, too, but then they are Australian...Anway, there are some softer things on the album, and there's a lot of influence from the psychedelic era and acid rock." "A-HA! Now we're getting somewhere. Tell us more about these psychedelics!" "Well, uhh, some of it's good and some of it is maybe the not-so-good psychedelia, if you know what I mean. Kind of like the stuff on that second Plasticland album—there's still an edge to it, but it comes real close to slipping into the muck. But then, Plasticland's third album is great, so..." "Quit wastin' my time! Sergeant!" WHAACK WHAAACK "Now are you gonna tell me about these psychedelic narcotics or am I gonna have to break your face?" "I dunno what you're talkin' about!" "Sergeant, break his face!" "WHACK WHACK SPLORRRK SPLAT "Now are you gonna tell us more or—" "Ummhff!" "Now what are you...you dumb baboon, how's he gonna talk without any lips?" "Sorry." "Sorry. I'll say you're sorry. Look at this mess. Well, we weren't getting anywhere anyway." "What do you want me to do with him?" " Tie him up. Take him to the junior prom. Feed him to your dog. Whatta wasta column inches." ■

spiders

burning with elvis in hell

by kurt sayenga (with chip drake and peter hayes)

A SUMMONS TO MEMPHIS

Friday, August 14. Peter's sitting in back eating veggie trail mix and Chip and I are in the cockpit chugging Diet Cokes and slamming mouthfuls of potato chips into our maws. We're going about, oh, 85 miles an hour or so with the windows open, which means that I'm driving. In two days Elvis Presley will have been dead for ten years, and I want to be at Graceland, right at ground zero, on Holy Day.

It has not been an easy journey. Yesterday Peter and I flew into GREED's Midwest Bureau in Cincinnati, Ohio, via Delta "We Get You There, Usually, More or Less" Airlines and today we've fried in Chip's luxury sedan for eight hours and counting. It's 2,456° outside with matching humidity and the temperature gauge shoots into the red whenever we turn on the air conditioning. We are as greasy as hour-old microwave french fries.

"Look! Up in the sky!" Chip shouts.

A huge black cloud hangs overhead—a giant hand, outstretched, palm up, begging for a handout.

This is clearly a bad omen, but my attempts to turn around and head back to what passes for civilization in Ohio are met with, well, less than a friendly response.

"This was your idea anyway," I am reminded by my so-called friends after a brief battle for control of the steering wheel. "You're the Elvis fan."

"You're right." I'm trying to settle down. I grab a handful of potato chips, shove them in my mouth, chew them a little then spit the greasy blob out the window. "This is a holy pilgrimage. We're here to cleanse Elvis' soul."

"Oh, shut up."

ELVIS IS INSIDE HIM

A bit later we ooze into an incredibly hot (and incredibly expensive) Memphis hotel room. Someone turns on the television set. Leeza Gibbons, on location at Graceland all week for *Entertainment Tonight,* is interviewing Little Kid Elvis, a blonde elementary-school age boy in a spangled white jumpsuit. The kid tells Leeza that everyone says he looks just like Elvis and sings just like Elvis. Elvis is a part of him. Elvis is *inside* him.

At Graceland it is considered perfectly acceptable to shove your seven-year-old into a rhinestone-splattered jumpsuit and present him as the Second Coming of Elvis. Plenty of people will pay to see the kid. People like us, for example.

Still excited about being in Memphis, not yet knowing that we were on a speedboat crossing the Styx, we resolve to track down the youthful pretender. Consulting a local newspaper, we discover that "Little Elvis" has a gig out at one of the airport hotels, where most of the pilgrims are staying. We set out.

On the way to the show we stop by an Elvis impersonator contest (or Elvis "tribute"—the word "impersonator" is frowned upon) down on Beale Street, "the birthplace of the Blues." The competition is just about over; mobs of people reeking of booze stagger to and fro. Most of the Elvi are dressed in Vegas-period Anti-Elvis regalia, complete with the black blob of hair, bushy sideburns and silver sunglasses. Many have wondered why Elvi impersonate mid-'70s, gone-to-seed Anti-Elvis as opposed to the Presley of the '50s or '60s (True Elvis). Simple: True Elvis was young, thin, hip, and very handsome; most Elvis impersonators are middle-aged, fat and boring.

TODAY'S JUNKIES ARE TOMORROW'S ELVI

So we're standing in the middle of Beale Street, a swirling crowd of rednecks and bleach-blondes and sailors and yuppie couples and Elvi flowing past us in a blur of pink and black. Most of the Elvi look pretty bad in their homemade outfits (some clad

in jumpsuits, a lot more in polyester recreations of rockabilly clothes), but they seem to be enjoying themselves and only a few appear to take the posing seriously. Considering the number of humorless Sid Vicious impersonators I'm still meeting nine years after that hapless sap spiked his final vein, I'm inclined to wonder if anyone from my generation has a right to sneer at these people. We have our subculture; they have theirs. Okay, theirs is pretty silly, but since the Summer of Hate punk has been reeling around like a drunk, walking headfirst into brick walls, falling down, getting up each time a little more dazed than the last. Silliness is relative.

Are amateur Elvis impersonators really harming anyone? And is it that strange that so many people would travel to Memphis to honor a man who changed so many lives?

In the 1950s Elvis was burning sex with the voice of God. I can only imagine what it was like to have been a teenager in '56, to have felt the full force of his cultural impact. Elvis fans stared into the face of the atomic blast and were transformed. Some of this has to do with his musical impact; a lot of it has to do with his sexuality.

True Elvis fans love Elvis in all of his incarnations. For most of the fans, especially for the women who fell hard for him in the '50s and comprised the majority of the crowd at Graceland, Elvis is not the pudgy guy in the jumpsuit of 1976, he's the sexual threat of 1955-1968. True fans remember Elvis the way they remember their first good sexual experience.

CLONING—GOOD SCIENCE OR BAD ENTERTAINMENT?

"Appearing tonight! Michael— Little Elvis!!" We buy our tickets and sit at the back of a small ballroom packed full of middle-aged women.

"Also Sprach Zarathustra" rings out of the cheap public address system. (Speaking of which, what would Nietzche have thought of Uberelvis?) The crowd is in a frenzy! Well, maybe not a frenzy, but they're definitely clapping! There, rushing in, a blur of white flanked by two "bodyguards"— it's Little Elvis!

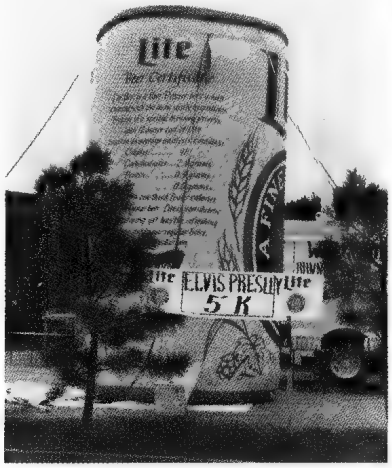
But...it's the *wrong* Little Elvis!

This guy is at least 35! Probably more like 40! He's short and chubby and kind of Italian! AND HE'S DOING ELVIS' ENTIRE 1976 VEGAS ACT!!!! All three and a half hours! "Welcome To My World" and "CC Rider" and "My Way" and "Don't Cry, Daddy" all performed in passable-to-deplorable form!

For about a half-hour the "tribute" is entertaining— it's amusing in its grotesque, spine-chilling way. Then my head starts to throb. After a while my life passes slowly before my eyes. After that someone else's life passes slowly before my eyes— someone with an alarming lack of regard for personal hygiene.

A pilgrim sitting next to us asks Chip where he got his Elvis t-shirt. "I haven't seen that one around." Chip is wearing a Costello tour shirt that reads "ELVIS— GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD." The pilgrim wears a Humes High School t-shirt. Humes was Elvis' old school, and we were all looking forward to going on the guided tour of the place— conducted by *present-day* Humes students. The pilgrim advises against it on the grounds that Humes "is all black now." Oh, dear. And just an hour earlier a cute waitress at a Beale Street restaurant told us that if we really wanted to know what Memphis is about we should "try getting a cab at night when you're black and female."

The pilgrim keeps talking to Chip (whose anguished grin sits frozen on his face for half an hour) and Michael keeps singing. I'd wondered how far the audience would go along with the "tribute"— would they accept this guy as the real thing and scream out "Elvis, touch me" or kiss the hem of his garment? In this case (and in all cases, several pilgrims told us) the answer is no. The



The Elvis 5 Kilometer Run, sponsored by Bud Lite. If the King had run a few of these he might have been with us today...

Peter contemplates shoplifting an Elvis swizel stick from one of the 50,000 gift shops at Graceland.

atmosphere in the hall is chummy, but certainly not reverential. If anything, it's like a strip club. The women call the impersonator Michael, not Elvis. They know he isn't anywhere near the real thing, but so long as he makes the moves and does passable versions of the songs, he's their boy. Bad sex is better than no sex at all.

Sometime deep into the set, Michael goes into the audience and distributes sweat-soaked scarves to the "ladies." At first the women pull the scarves off his neck. Then Michael sticks them in his jumpsuit, first by his chest, then in his crotch. The women cheer and laugh. Michael shoves his scarf very, very deep down and a flushed, somewhat younger woman reaches into the jumpsuit for it. "You can have anything you can find," Michael says. I'll bet she won't find much.

If Elvis were alive, would he kick the shit out of this guy?

Maybe not. Anti-Elvis would be all for it—another knife in his own chest. But the Hillbilly Cat? Yeah, he'd kick the shit out of him.

After the scarf-diving incident we make our break for the door. A banner that I hadn't seen before announces that the proceeds from this event are going to a local children's hospital. Does that make it right? I don't know.

ELVIS DOES BETTY FORD

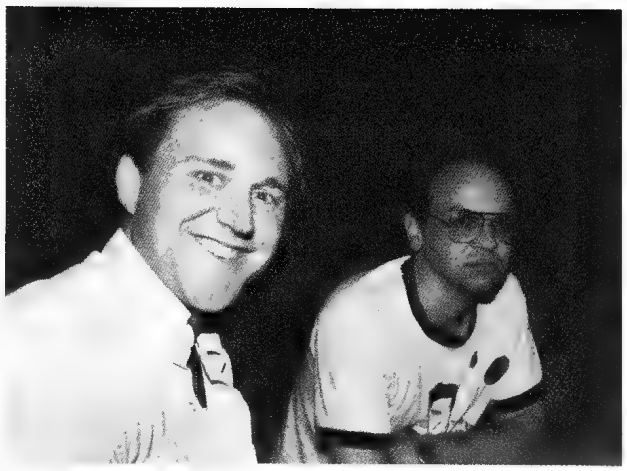
On our way back to the hotel Chip asks, and answers, the question of the hour: What if Elvis had lived? Would he be fatter than ever, completely strung out on medication and fried bacon fat? No way. Had he lived, Elvis would be doing *Oprah*, telling the tearful audience how he sank to the lowest low, not even *realizing* he had a drug problem until he heard about the Betty Ford Clinic on TV. After two months of potato peeling with Liz and Liza, the slimmed-down, tanned, feeling-good-about-himself, tuxedo-clad Elvis would be killin' them in Vegas, singing spiritual material and maybe a few standards, you know, "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" and that sort of thing....

THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL, PART I

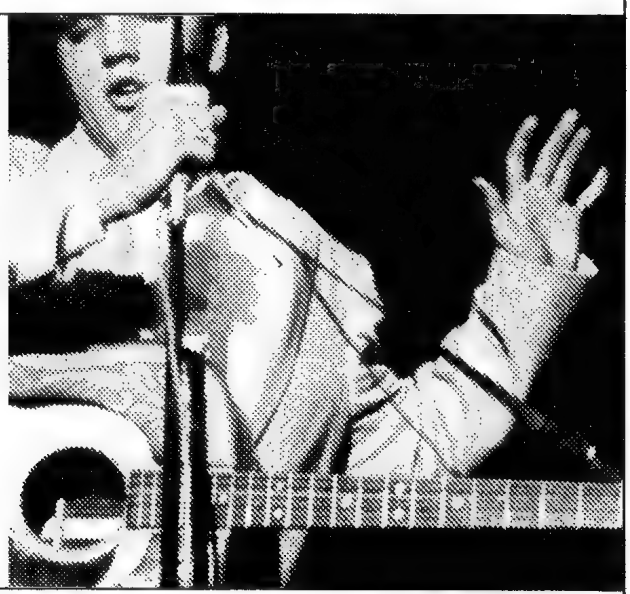
Saturday, August 15. Graceland. The Presley mansion stands behind the famous musical gates and a stone wall covered with graffiti. Twenty-some officially-sanctioned Graceland tourist traps sit in a mall directly across the street, a string of leeches draining black blood from a corpse. To one side of Graceland a sign announces building plans for a Graceland hotel with a thousand rooms; on the other side a Graceland trailer park (!) is under construction. Up and down the avenue people are trying to cash in; local garages offer the "Elvis Presley Special—Tuneup $10.00."

You can't just drive into the Presley Estate. You have to go to the tourist traps to buy tickets for a shuttle over to the house. We came early to dodge the crowds and the heat (already unbearable at 7:00 am) and wound up with tickets for a tour three and half hours later. Sure, it was their busy season, but it's one heck of a wacky coincidence that thousands of pilgrims had hours to kill and nothing to do but shop. (There were no chairs or picnic areas anywhere; you had to stay on your feet and keep moving.)

Elvis music blasts over the public address system. Here are some of the things you can buy at Graceland: Replicas of Elvis' will; Elvis Special Deputy commission papers; Elvis playing cards; Elvis lighters; lots of weird ceramic Elvis objects; an Elvis beer stein; Elvis piggy banks; Elvis ash trays; I've Been To Graceland ashtrays; Memphis pennants; candles to burn at the memorial vigil; Elvis pencils; Elvis can openers; Elvis coffee cups; Elvis shot glasses; lots of copies of Priscilla "I'm Riding The Milk Train" Presley's *Elvis and Me;* E.P. Boulevard keychains; Anti-



Chip (with the crazed smile), on the verge of a homicidal rampage after conversing with a pilgrim during an Elvis impersonator show.



Crowds of pilgrims masterfully conceal their enthusiasm as they wait at the doors of the King's mansion.

Elvis sunglasses; Elvis 10th Anniversary clocks; Elvis nail clippers; bumper stickers reading "EP Boulevard," "I've Been Inside Graceland," "I ❤ Elvis," etc.; Elvis pencil holders; fake $1,000 bills with the King's picture on them; Elvis posters, postcards, glossy photos, t-shirts, warm-up jackets, baseball caps, and visors; Elvis car tags (1 ELVIS with Tennessee markings); Elvis brush/comb sets and knick-knack boxes; Graceland magic wands; Elvis bells, pins, and souvenir spoons; Love Me Tender shampoo and body lotion; Elvis beach towels; and Confederate flags. Need I add that all of these items are brutally overpriced?

Graceland is an evil place—a place worse than Las Vegas, inconceivable as that might sound. Las Vegas exploits greed and need and desperation; Graceland exploits love.

Elvis read heavily on religious themes, and now he is a religious theme. Graceland is his temple, and the temple has been overrun by necrophiliac pimps. Elvis' disciples come to pay homage to sex and youth and danger, and instead they get their wallets gang-banged by accountants.

We look for the Cramps. We look for Little Kid Elvis. No luck.

And on banners everywhere, the official slogan of the 10th anniversary: Ten Years Is Forever. What exactly does that mean? Ten years is forever, and gee we really miss him? Ten years is forever, and it's surprising that anyone still gives a damn? Ten years is forever, not to mention profitable? TEN YEARS ISN'T LONG ENOUGH.

THE GRACELAND GESTAPO

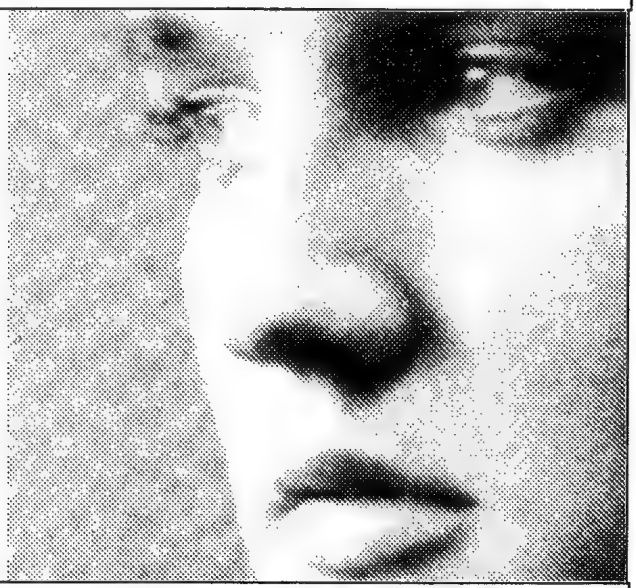
Our Graceland tour guides are young and humorless. The female guides are of the big-toothed Farrah-haired Southern sorority variety; the males are large and surly. They all recite memorized speeches about various parts of the house with little interest but, in the case of the sorority sisters, plenty of bubble-headed perkiness. Specific questions are met with a dazed look, followed by an audible click as peanut-sized brains latch onto an officially-approved rote answer that more or less touches on the subject of your inquiry. If you phrase the question differently, they repeat the same answer, word-for-word.

About a third of the way through the tour one of our guides (we were passed along to about ten) asks what that little thing in Peter's hand is. "It's a tape recorder." "You haven't been recording this, have you?!" "Well, a little bit..." Jesus jumping Christ! Without any further discussion the kid whips out his walkie-talkie and five seconds later the Graceland Gestapo, dressed in the latest high-fashion paramilitary summer SWAT gear, bursts into the parlor, grabs the recorder, checks us over for other illegal devices, then informs us that our tape will be erased and the recorder held at the guard booth until we completed our visit. Apparently the paranoid Graceland execs fear that enterprising fans will tape the audio portion of the tour and sell it to the punters, cutting into the sales of Graceland's own audio and video-tape versions of the tour. (This was not explained to us, however; it's just the only possible reason I can think of for such an idiotic policy.)

The forcible seizure has its good side. We are now able to get right in front at every exhibit on the rest of the tour, as our fellow pilgrims treat us with the same deference that airline passengers afford gun-toting terrorists.

Much of Graceland is closed to the public, including the bathroom where Elvis died. The house is not all that big, and it's not even as tacky as I had been assured it would be—I mean, carpeting the walls is an interior design risk that I personally wouldn't take, but to each his own. Surprisingly, Elvis had some decent paintings hanging on the walls, including a Warhol. We ask several of our sorority-pinned tour guides for information

Elvis kept a gold-plated grand piano in the living room. The carpeting is knee-deep white pile.



Kurt takes aim on a pilgrim, not realizing that he is only SECONDS AWAY from an encounter with the dreaded Graceland Gestapo.

about the painting. "Who?" "Warhol. Andy Warhol." "Andy who? Where-hole?" "War-hall. He's an artist." "War-hole?" "An artist. From New York. He's dead, too." "You're puttin' me on, right?"

Some of Elvis' cars sit outside. Although he gave Cadillacs away, Elvis personally preferred black Stutz Bearcats and Ferraris. (So he wasn't totally deranged.) Our tour guide tells us that the '76 Stutz "hasn't been touched since Elvis' death." I ask how that's possible, given that the car has '86 plates. "Oh. Well, I don't know. Maybe his father drove it."

A number of handguns are on display in the Elvis trophy room. They aren't labelled, but I'm pretty sure I spotted a stainless steel .357 Magnum, a .44 Magnum, a Colt Python, a .38 Detective's Special, two Centennial-issue .45s, and a few derringers. Most of the guns are fitted with custom grips and sights; some are ornately engraved. The barrel interiors showed signs of wear. This is the place where one is obliged to insert a joke about target practice on TV sets, I suppose.

In an extremely rare display of good taste, no tour guide is present at the last stop of the tour, the Graceland family plot. On the way out to the guardhouse we pass a large display of wreaths and tribute art sent by Elvis fans around the world. It all seems very heartfelt, even the big hound dog made out of flowers, and so it seems completely out of place.

OFF THE PIGS

It doesn't matter what you think of Elvis. It doesn't matter whether you believe that he was a good-hearted country boy or a corrupt sleazebag, a talented man who destroyed himself or a slow-witted working class boy crushed under the heel of capitalism. *No one* deserves to be exploited, especially after they're dead, especially the way Elvis is being exploited. Elvis is a zombie in thrall to his masters, in thrall to the holders of his estate and the owners of his name.

When Elvis' daughter Lisa Marie turns 25 she inherits pretty much the whole ball of wax. If she has any regard for her old man she'll weld the gates of Graceland shut and build a moat around the place. Then she'll sue *everybody*.

But I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for it to happen.

THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL, PART 2

After an eight-hour break (much of it spent on a fruitless quest for a meatless entree) we return to Graceland for the Candlelight Vigil. Every year thousands of pilgrims mark the day of Elvis' passing by lining up next to the Wailing Wall and trudging up the mansion driveway to Elvis' grave. We were expecting hysteria on this holy night, or at least some display of emotion. Instead all we see are hollow-eyed, poker-faced spuds who could just as well be touring the Prehistoric Prairie Dog exhibit at the Peoria Museum of Natural History. They cared enough to come, but they aren't having a particularly good time. (Maybe getting screwed by the local merchants has something to do with that.)

Thousands of fans line the streets, some standing in line, others sitting in lawn chairs set up on the sidewalks of Elvis Presley Boulevard (blocked off in the vicinity of Graceland). Despite the size of the crowd, almost no one is openly boozing it up. We aren't sure if this is out of reverence to the King or reverence to all the cops around.

It's 10:00 pm and the temperature hangs at 98°.

AT THE WAILING WALL

Graffiti on the Wailing Wall: Dear Elvis, You are the Jesus on my pizza. Elvis: Spuds is taking over. Elvis, we're burning our leathers in downriver Detroit. "Elvis," you're the greatest thing since "Christ." Elvis is the best person I ever nown. Don't stup on

Anti-Elvis' version of the American Dream: A .357 Magnum, a bottle of Percodans, and a badge.

my blue suede shoes. Elvis, you are always on my mine. The king of rock and roll will always rein.

The couple in front of us start talking. Actually, the woman in front of us starts talking and talking and talking faster than a broker trying to unload sinking stock; her husband stared at the ground. Somehow we wind up on the receiving end of her nonstop monologue. Like most pilgrims, she has been in town all week and treats us like congenital idiots when we reveal it's our first time at Graceland. Peter goes off to find some tribute candles and Chip and I spend the next half-hour looking at each other out of the corner of our eyes as the woman babbles.

She discovers that Chip lives in Ohio and proceeds to catalog all the people she knows from the Buckeye State (all of whom are, we are told, "touched in the haid"), starting with her Italian neighbor. She doesn't like Italian names. "Well you know how Italian names are."

"Long, complicated," Chip says, looking elsewhere.

"And they all end with a vowel."

"Exactly."

"Well, the line is moving, from where we are now we'll be there in an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, it really all depends on who's up there, I mean some of them get up there and stop, they get up there and stop, and they bawl and spoil the peach, you know what I mean? Well I seen it, they got a paramedic up there, an ambulance, and let me tell you, people need it, swooning and all, it's embarrassing."

"Well, you won't see that from us."

Then she tells us about the nostalgia concert at Mudd Island. "This woman behind us, when (some country and western guy) sang that song he did for Elvis this woman behind us just started squallin' and bawlin'—it was embarrassin'—I couldn't take it. And this other guy I knew from Ohio, he came over to my house and rang the doorbell, he'd ring the doorbell 20 times before you could get out there and answer the door! He was crazy! And..."

"What part of Ohio did he come from?"

"What part of Ohio did he come from?" she asks her husband, who doesn't answer. Probably trying to decide if he has enough cash saved up for a good divorce lawyer.

"He was real funny, we just loved him, and he'd aggravate my kids, we have twins, they're 14 and they know everything—you know, like 14 year olds are—and he was so aggravating to them and I just loved it. *They* claimed to hate him. In fact, he was even mean to my dog. My dog, he likes to chew on everybody, and Paul would come in there and sit there and talk to me and just hold the dog's mouth shut. He was crazy!"

"If this goes on for two hours, I'm going to die," Chip says to me.

"No, they get up there and stop, they get up there and stop, that's what they do, trust me."

"We gotta go. I dressed wrong. It's way too hot out here."

"You certainly did dress wrong. You gotta dress like you're going to *hell*, know what I mean?"

"Oh yeah," Chip and I answer in unison.

SUN STUDIOS

Sunday, August 16. Hotter than you can possibly believe hot can be. Sticky, too. It's our last day in Memphis and we're determined to have fun (i.e., stay away from Graceland). By this point I'm pissed off at Elvis, pissed off at Graceland, pissed off at the heat, pissed off in general. Today we visit Sun Studios.

Studio Manager Dave Aron and his partner reopened Sun last spring. They've restored the studio to its '50s configuration, stocking it with beautiful period instruments, including a very rare Gibson ES-295. "Scotty Moore sold his 295 two years ago for

The only bad part of the Sun Studio tour was waiting outside in the brutal Tennessee heat.

Humes High School and Sun Studios are the only Elvis-related places in Memphis that shouldn't be burned to the ground.

$15,000—a pretty exorbitant price for a guitar," Aron says, "but you gotta consider the rarity of the guitar itself, plus it was Scotty Moore's and it did play on everything Elvis did on the Sun label, so I guess he had some justification there...not much, though..."

Somebody asks if "new artists" come in wanting Aron to "set up the same sound." "Well, I've pulled it off many times. It's not too difficult." Aron mentions that Ringo Starr and a bunch of other rock star types have recorded there recently. "We're a fully-functional recording studio, and we cut tracks practically every night, except for Elvis Week." A bonehead asks why "Ringo Starr would come here when he could go someplace with new electronic stuff." Aron, showing remarkable restraint, replies, "Why would Bob Dylan and U2 come all the way out of their way to see this place? Because it's Sun. They can always find a state-of-the-art facility, but it will never be the same as Sun."

Studio time at Sun goes for $60 an hour. They record on 12-track and are going to 24-track soon.

Peter meets a guy named Vladimir—a fellow DC area musician—who drove straight down to Graceland, pausing only to pour 35 quarts of oil into his aging Cadillac convertible.

HUMES HIGH—NO FLASHES, PLEASE

When Elvis went to school Humes was an all-white senior high. Now it's an all-black junior high. The Humes tour is hosted by monumentally bored 13-year-olds. It is exactly like going on a tour of any American school anywhere, except for the Elvis art, and it is very, very funny, thanks to our guides' deadpan recitation of tour speeches in the most mono of monotones. Elvis Presley doesn't interest most teenagers in the slightest, especially black teens in Memphis, who every year watch the curious spectacle of white people flooding into town to praise the man who made black rhythm and blues "safe" for Middle America. (Graceland is easy to find, but the Memphis hotel where Martin Luther King was murdered is not.)

After a slide show, we are led into the Elvis Room, a small classroom that has been more-or-less remodeled to more-or-less resemble Elvis' American history class. We wait for our next guide to arrive. And wait. And wait. Finally the single most bored teen I've ever seen (outside of my mirror a few years ago) slinks into the room. He recites his speech with his eyes locked somewhere about ten miles to the east.

"Here is a locker of the type Elvis used during that period. Lockers were orange at the time." A football helmet and jersey sits in a beaten-up locker in the corner. "Ummn," I delicately inquire, "That football helmet on the locker—Elvis, well, he really didn't *play* football, did he?" "Nooooo." "Okay."

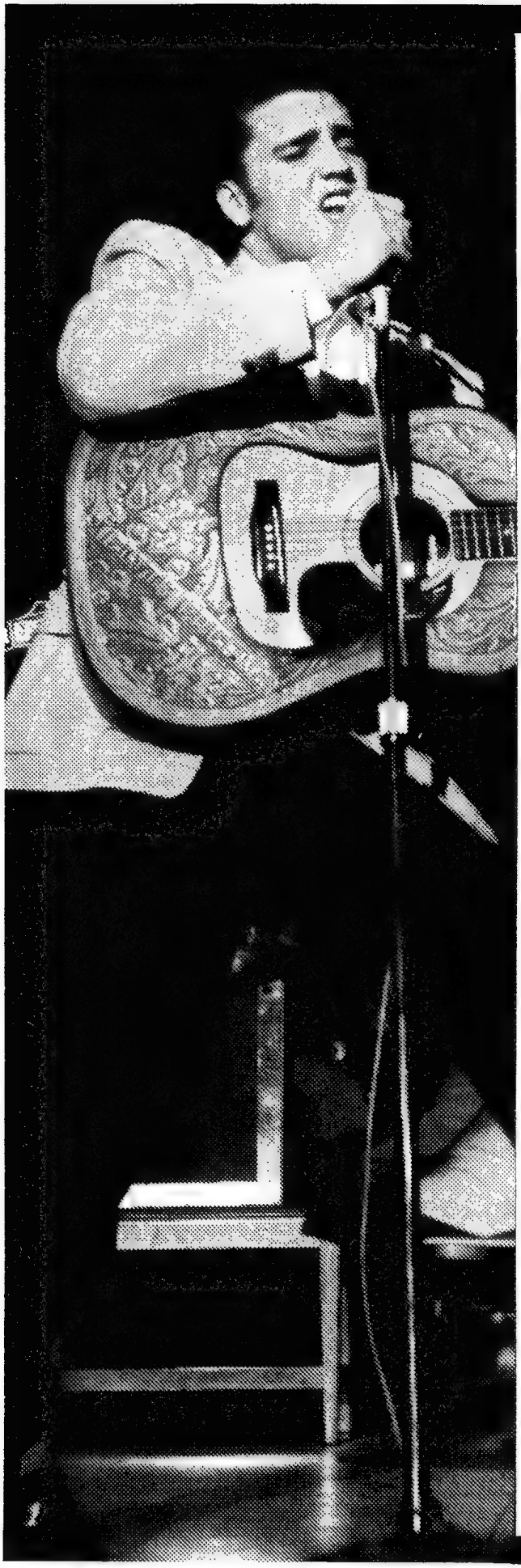
Then, with a voice as flat as an open can of Coke left in a refrigerator for a week, our guide says the words we've heard a hundred times in the last two days: "Take your time and browse around the exhibits." His eyes slide to the doorway; his body slowly follows—"And take pictures if you like..." —halfway through the door now—"...As long as it does not..."—his voice, a ghostly echo from the hallway—"...require a flash." And he's gone, never to return.

BELOW THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL

That night we drive across a nightmare bridge high above black water into the absolute darkness of Arkansas. No other cars, no moonlight, no streetlights, just the highway.

Frightening things on the roadside—forests of dead trees, junkyards filled with burning cars, trailer parks, chemical factories, black smokestacks, or worse yet, *nothing at all.*

Far, far ahead, something huge and black squats in the gloom, blacker than the night sky Something with three heads.



We look for an exit, which we never find. Finally we turn around in the middle of the highway.

At midnight we return to Graceland.

THE PASSION OF LITTLE KID ELVIS

Milling with the tourists, brushing past $160 silk warmup jackets with TCB patches, jostling tourists from Maine, thinking, withering, head swimming. It's midnight and it's 100° and you have to stay in the shops to keep cool, but when you're in the shops you're in the thick of the badness, the heart of the evil.

A blast of white light shoots into the store. The light grows stronger— a dozen wavering, blinding flashes and kliegs. Photographers and camera crews face the storefront, all looking down at something just below the window. Press my face against the glass, hoping against hope, and there he is— bathed in light, his greasy blonde pompadour shooting off sparks, his white jumpsuit dazzling, whiter than Arctic snow, whiter than Ozzie Nelson.

Little Kid Elvis.

Outside he's entertaining the troops, explaining his mysterious calling. Elvis is a part of him even though the King died before he was born. Elvis is inside him. All along his manager/presumably-father nods his head in agreement and utters words of support. Someone gives Little Kid Elvis a rose and he poses with it, sticking the stem in his mouth like he's dancing the tango, and someone asks him a question and he replies, "Murrwwfffff mmmmnnfffthh, mttfffmmnh!"

Elvis is inside him. Something about those eyes, something about the way he stands, something about that hair, something about his cockiness, something about his fright. Little Kid Elvis presses his thumbs against his eyes and screams "Let me out, let me out, let me out!" and every light in Graceland explodes.

Elvis is inside him. The sky turns crimson and purple and a hundred clawed black fists punch down into the Earth, rip out hunks of land, let flesh melt between their burning fingertips. Little Kid Elvis stands unharmed. He walks through the stone wall, up to the family plot, and digs up the King's grave with his bare hands. He rips open the lid of the casket as twin thunderbolts crash into the mansion and set it ablaze. He lifts the withered corpse from its resting place and tears its head from its body. Standing in the midst of the Inferno, Little Kid Elvis pitches the head across the street into the tourist traps, where it explodes in a flash of pink and black, followed a half-second later by a huge discordant tone, every off-note ever sung all at once, and then Graceland is gone, nothing left but a smoking black pit.

Elvis is inside him. It's all over. The tormented soul can sleep. Flames engulf the child. He sneers.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT GREED

But that last part didn't really happen, did it? Just a little vision I had as I lay crumpled in the middle of Elvis Presley Boulevard, passed out from the heat. Little Kid Elvis held the rose between his teeth and shutters opened and closed and tape rolled and everyone smiled. "Isn't he cute!" more than a few pilgrims said as they waddled back to their recreational vehicles. Yeah, he was cute. And the more time passes the less Elvis (True or Anti or any other variation) will mean to anyone. The 10th anniversary was a landmark, and it's all downhill from here. Sooner or later— probably sooner— the profits at Graceland will turn into big losses and the whole filthy enterprise will fade into oblivion, like a strip mine that's been played out.

But for now, we'll leave Graceland the way we found it— hot, sticky and corrupt. Elvis may not be smiling wherever he is, but Little Elvis and Little Kid Elvis are. And a fake smile is better than no smile at all. ■

In 1985 Live Skull was looking everywhere for a human brain. The New York-based band wanted a picture of one to adorn the cover of their album, "Bringing Home the Bait."

"We looked every conceivable place," recalls guitarist Mark C. "We tried to find a monkey brain instead, but it didn't turn up," adds the band's other guitarist, Tom Paine. "We ended up going to a slaughterhouse market where they sell just about any kind of animal organ there is and decided to settle for a cow brain. The one on the cover went on top of the trophy and we photographed it outside in front of Mark's house—we needed to prop it up with toothpicks because it was really hot and it was sort of drooping in the sun. Little pieces came off on your hands when you touched it." Photographed in color, the brain looks swollen, soft, bifurcated just a little too deeply.

The brain on the black and white back cover of "Bringing Home the Bait" sits demurely eerie on the trophy, encircled by flames. It seems a little firmer than the cover brain. "We froze that one," says Tom. "We got an extra one to withstand the heat."

Live Skull takes a serious approach. "Clenched fist" doesn't really come to mind to describe the tightness and intensity of Live Skull's four records—"clenched teeth" is more like it. Mark and Tom learned to play the guitar together years ago, and their two axes churn together in a continous metallic whir. They don't solo or play around each other—they play *with* each other. The sound is thick, heavy, feverishly hot and forbiddingly cold at once, visceral and very brainy. Until lead singer Thalia Zedek joined this fall, the band projected a rigid austerity onstage. Live Skull has its likeable moments, but it's a difficult band.

Live Skull's new album, *Dusted*, is the best record it has ever made. The songs are more accessible, but haven't lost their edge. The mix is clearer and sharper than usual, and Zedek's vocals give the band's material a texture and sinuousness it has never had before. Her singing style, recalling Patti Smith, Marianne Faithfull, the Au Pair's Lesley Woods, and even Iggy Stooge, adds excitement and depth—for the first time, the vocals enrich and measure up to the music.

Sitting in Mark's New York loft before the album was released, Tom and Mark talked matter-of-factly about their music. The band does all its own cover and promotional artwork, and the young men showed off some pictures they'd used of college girls performing sadomasochistic acts circa 1953, obtained from the nearby Museum of Soft-Core Pornography. They picked a few top hits from their record collection (DNA, PiL's *Second Edition*, the first record by New York's White Zombies, old Redd Kross, Dischord Records' *Flex Your Head* compilation). "The problem with being in a band

STORY BY CAROLINE ELY

BRAINS BIG ENOUGH

LIVE SKULL: SMART BAND IN A HARD PLACE

is that you dissect everyone else's music. You can't just listen to it, you have to take it apart," says Mark.

The density of Live Skull's sound, the relentless way it builds songs, the stony allure of its female bassist, Marnie Greenholtz, and its New York-mental cruelty lyrics often lead rock critics to compare the band to Sonic Youth. Mark discourages these comparisons. "Sonic Youth is a lot of different things. It's a hard-rock band, an art band, and they experiment with pop—there's a lot of play in Sonic Youth. We don't have that sense of play. We just go out and concentrate really hard on what we're doing. Also, Sonic Youth uses all kinds of unusual tunings, and our tuning is just straight, regular tuning. It's a completely different sound."

The personnel changes have also put a distance between Live Skull and the Sonic Ones. Band members used to take turns singing, but Thalia Zedek, formerly of Boston art-punk-rock bands Dangerous Birds and Uzi, now handles most of the vocals. Live Skull also replaced its outstanding drummer, James Lo, with Rich Harris Mark C. says that the new members have brought "renewed energy to the band."

It is certainly true that the group sounds and looks a lot different than it used to. When Live Skull played Washington, DC's Nightclub 9:30 in late October, Thalia thrashed about to the music, adding an interactive element to the band's passive-aggressive stage presence. Live Skull has jettisoned its sinewy old faves like "Sparky" and "Fort Belvedere" for newer, looser songs that Thalia has helped write. The replacement drummer pounds out a rock and roll beat worlds away from the flourishes of James Lo, who structured and varied the songs piece by piece in an almost symphonic manner.

"James had to work everything out," says Tom "Everything he did was very calculated. He wouldn't do regular rock beats because too many bands were doing them—we would have had to put slivers of bamboo under his fingernails to get those beats. Rich is not a virtuoso like James, but he brings a rock sensibility to the songs." "It's OK to have the rock sound," adds Mark, "because we don't really play—don't really know how to play—regular rock and roll anyway.

"We're glad we have him. You wouldn't believe the number of rotten drummers we tried out."

The addition of a lead singer allows the band's musicians to apply their deadly-earnest concentration to playing their instruments. Both guitarists refer to singing as "the other thing" in the course of the conversation, and it doesn't seem to have been something they burned with desire to do. "Marnie misses it, I think. She sang for different reasons than we did," Tom says.

"Of course my family wonders why I'm doing this. Sometimes we wonder why we're doing this. I can't help but wonder when it's going to turn around one way or another." —Mark C.

The Skulls rarely shared or traded off vocals within songs, and still don't—it's one of the things that makes their sound so determined and single-minded. Mark: "We just did it a litle bit on *Bringing Home the Bait*. It didn't come naturally." Tom: "That's an example of an honest impulse, an honest influence, that didn't rise to the surface."

DELUXE BRAIN PLATTER COMING RIGHT UP

In *Dusted*, the band wanted to release an album with "a more relaxed, laid-back feel" than previous records. "We want to bring out more of that in the music," he says. He discusses a side of the band that its records rarely convey, at one point using the word "mellow" with a shrug. Mellow? Laid-back? Hmm. Asked what vinyl evidence exists of this softer side, Tom mentions "Pusherman," the group's cover of the Curtis Mayfield soul tune, which is rivetingly grim or incredibly depressing, depending on your point of view. "Raise the Manifestation," offers Mark. "That's a pretty tune."

Many of Live Skull's songs originate from the members' experience ("Fort Belvedere" chronicles an acid trip in the hills of Florence), group effort, and long hours of jamming. Mark explains the band's unwillingness to impose a specific direction on an album: "We try to avoid hitting people over the head with a concept like the Swans' 'Time is Money, Bastard,' 'Greed,' 'Money is Flesh' and so on—we don't want to be too obvious. We don't have a theme in mind, necessarily, but we try to put a record together doing things to the songs so that they are more than a collection of our newest tunes."

"The records usually end up having their themes anyway," Tom remarks. "*Bringing Home the Bait* came out of a very stress-related time for everyone." It emerges that Tom and Marnie had been involved in a two-and-a-half-year relationship that entered its final throes of death when the band was wrapping up its songs and going into the studio. "The last year or so was a living hell," he remembers. "It was like on the album." Asked whether the scars are healed two years down the line, Tom and Mark pause. "It's what you might expect," Tom murmurs. "It's okay now," says Mark.

"Anyway, the songs come out of our experiences, but people shouldn't necessarily think we're like that"—Tom clenches his fists and squares his shoulders—"ALL the time."

Bãnd members all share songwriting credits. "It's not worth it to figure out who wrote what part or who's responsible for what bassline," says Mark. "It doesn't really matter. If we were making more money, it probably would, but..."

IF YOU'RE SO SMART, WHY AIN'T YOU RICH?

Live Skull has earned critical raves—the *New York Times*' Robert Palmer is a particular fan—but like many bands signed to the larger independent record labels such as Homestead, it has not reached a mass audience. Known primarily as a New York entity, the band has toured in Europe and made only sporadic forays into the United States. Its standing even within the indie realm is unclear; the band has a lower profile than Sonic Youth or the Swans, the bands to which it is compared most often.

Mark: "Not enough people know that Live Skull exists. More people would like our music if they only knew about us—plenty of people are sick of what they're listening to and would like something different.

"People hear about us in the oddest ways. A friend of ours who lives in Europe saw a sixteen-year-old French girl who had written "Live Skull" on her notebook. Where did she hear of us? We got to be friends with her when we went over there, but it was a one in a million chance that she would know who we were."

Tom: "We never get a uniformly good OR bad response anywhere. It's very hard to say what impact we've had or how popular we are."

According to Mark and Tom, Live Skull audiences vary enormously from city to city. Hardcore kids pile out in Philadelphia; at DC's 9:30, the band attracted a small but devoted bag of mixed oddballs (Thalia's folks were there); a crowd of veteran scenesters forms the band's base of support in its hometown. Sometimes the audiences are huge, sometimes small, and it's often hard to tell which it's going to be.

The uncertainty over audience size and character seeps into other areas as well, such as: What kind of sound mix are we going to get? "We have sound problems. Always," declares Mark flatly. "When we're not the headliner, the sound people ignore us even though we are pretty well-known and have four or five records out. Almost never is the occasion when all of us hear what we need to hear in the monitors—the sound at the 9:30 was an absolute mess, for an example." For sound reasons (ha ha), the band hesitates to make use of Thalia's formidable guitar skills: "She's an amazing guitarist, but the sound is so heavy already—another guitarist is going to complicate things, make the sound even muddier. What we really need is our own sound man."

With no sound man and no manager, Live Skull has to struggle, and it's easy to tell that the years of fighting bad sound, booking gigs and tours, and looking for recognition have made the band a little weary. Also a little poor.

Mark: "We've basically staked our livelihoods on the band, and we make some money on the band, but we make more money on our jobs. So of course every day we spend on the band, we end up making a little less money."

Family pressure to grow up and get serious provokes internal doubts sometimes. "Of course they wonder why I'm doing this. Sometimes *we* wonder why we're doing this. I can't help but wonder when it's going to turn around one way or another."

Tom: "Jobs can be inconvenient. Thalia's basically been on vacation, between jobs, ever since she joined—in fact, we were going to call the record *On Vacation With Live Skull*—and it's hard for her to keep jobs, with the way her schedule goes."

Thalia lives in Boston. The rest of the band lives in New York. This hasn't been a problem yet, but probably will be in the future. "We'll have to see about a definite schedule," says Mark.

It's apparent that the band hopes that its new singer will add some alpha waves to the indie world EEG. Mark: "Thalia makes the band special. She jumps around. She's friendly." Tom: "She gives her phone number out at a moment's notice. Oh, just kidding." Perhaps Thalia and *Dusted* will warm the band's brains over. ***(Scratch that.** At press time we learned that both Thalia and Marnie have left Live Skull. It's a pity—*Dusted *is the group's best album. Calls to Mark C. reached only a machine. The group's future, for GREED at least, is shrouded in mystery.)* ■

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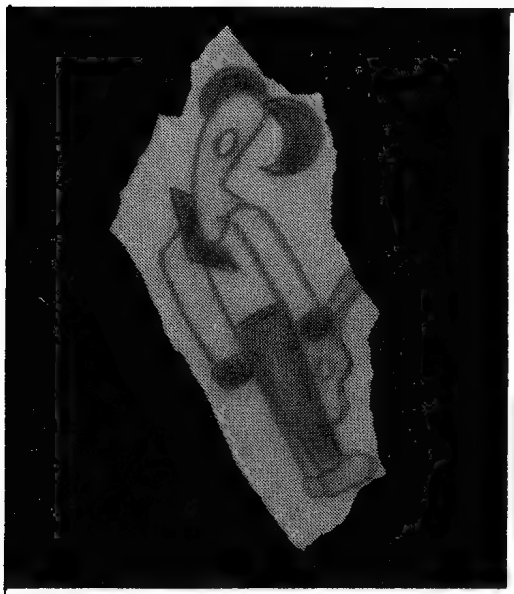

BLUE ELVIS

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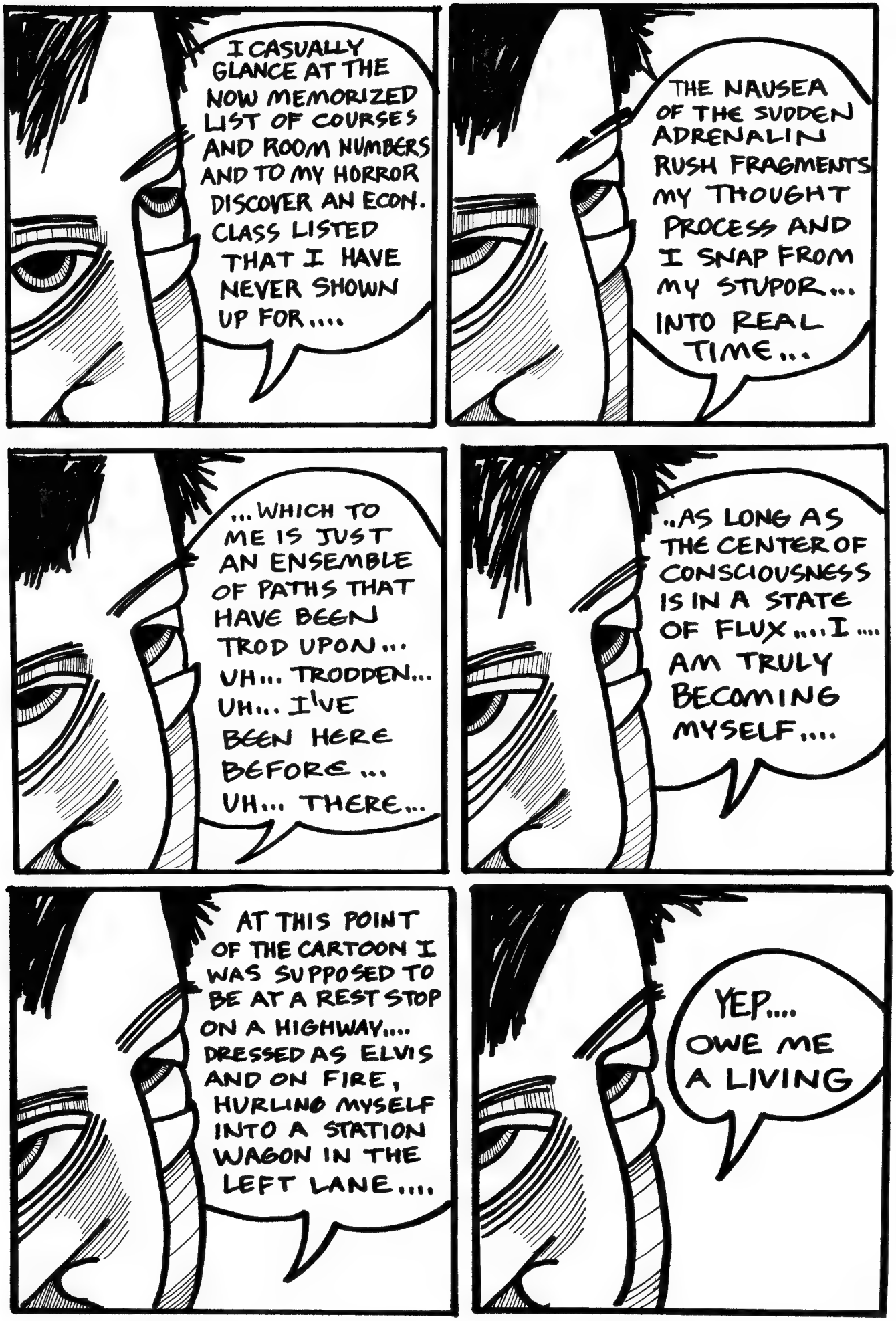
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THE NAUSEA OF THE SUDDEN ADRENALIN RUSH FRAGMENTS MY THOUGHT PROCESS AND I SNAP FROM MY STUPOR... INTO REAL TIME...
...WHICH TO ME IS JUST AN ENSEMBLE OF PATHS THAT HAVE BEEN TROD UPON... UH... TRODDEN... UH... I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE... UH... THERE...
..AS LONG AS THE CENTER OF CONSCIOUSNESS IS IN A STATE OF FLUX....I.... AM TRULY BECOMING MYSELF....
AT THIS POINT OF THE CARTOON I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AT A REST STOP ON A HIGHWAY.... DRESSED AS ELVIS AND ON FIRE, HURLING MYSELF INTO A STATION WAGON IN THE LEFT LANE....
YEP.... OWE ME A LIVING

By Caroline Ely

My baby sister has become a giant. It seems like such a short while ago that I patted her little bald head or held her up to look at things—then again, I'd sometimes knock her down on her little behind too.

She reminds me of this often. "You victimized me!" she roars. She's not a baby anymore. She stamps her foot, half the size of a coal barge. "You wouldn't let me join in your childhood games!"

"Sorry," I say, looking up at the underside of her jaw. Her arm waves around like the boom on a frigate in a storm; her hands, always curiously underdeveloped and blunt, like cat's paws, open and close by my head and stir up salty breezes.

"You're still oppressing me. You deliberately chose a house with an eight-foot ceiling so I couldn't go into it."

"It was kind of hard to find another one. I can't exactly afford Buckingham Palace, you know."

"Very funny. Contemporary housing discriminates against the oversized." She brings her huge face down to only three feet above mine. There's no escaping those eyes. I can't see around them. "The oversized are the truly marginalized in this society."

There's no escaping those ize. I want to point out that she often complains about how she was treated back when she was little. But she's started walking away already, feet beating the earth like pile-drivers. Her back is already turned; she swats a pigeon out of her hair with a fidgety little gesture. "Bye!" I bellow. "Bye!" She can't hear me. She gets over Sixteenth Street in two steps flat.

While I sleep it off, my sister is out improving the quality of human life. She pulls whole fruit trees out of the ground in Great Falls and gives them to the poor, who on the whole would rather have fries and a shake. She overturns the cars of drunk drivers after allowing them them ten seconds to run for cover.

That isn't all. She regularly strides out to farms and laboratories to free the terrorized animals, prising open the doors or demolishing the barns to let the turkeys, swine or rats run free. My sister has gotten into some trouble with the law, especially in her animal rights justice forays. They tried to take her to jail once, but she couldn't fit into any of the cells. They got tired of her demanding justice and making speeches in the atrium so they sprung her the same day.

Usually by the time she makes her dusty way home, I'm somewhat awake. "Get up, you miserable drunk!" she shouts through the chimney. I struggle into some clothes as her face fills up the window.

I prepare food every evening—always natural-type food. Ever cut the bruises off 20 head of cauliflower? It's quite a chore, believe me. Making hummus is a hassle also—I need to get up early to canoe through bushels of chick peas, and peeling four pounds of onions would make anybody cry. I wish she just liked hot dogs or something easy.

She always eats outside. Once her entourage wanted to go indoors for a meal when it was snowing, but my sister accused them of being traitors desensitized to the plight of the dispossessed, so they stayed out. Her people are all my size—some of the girls are even smaller. They are eager young types who share my sister's goals.

From indoors I can hear them talk about my sister in hushed tones as they eat, between bites.

"Such dedication."

"You never know what she's thinking. She just takes *ac*tion."

"...Overturned a Murry's *Steaks* truck *Tues*day...."

"So *into* it."

My sister knows she's being talked about. She looks away, a certain tightness about the lips betraying the suppression of a smile. The way she toys with her hair is coy in one so large. It'll make snarls too. We'll have to go through it with a gardening tool later on.

I should tell you something. This is not "magic realism." This actually is true. My sister is a giant. Scientists and medical people keep studying her and taking blood tests, but it's pretty clear to me that she is self-made—her ideals and personality took her body along with them as they grew to an impossible scale.

Even as a little child my sister stood like an Egyptian king, balanced, untippable, fists clenched and decorously leading with her chin. She was a model of self-control. Her features took on that marble Greek-goddess cast so early, even down to the opacity of the eyes. The perplexing growth began at four, when she gave up desserts. By the time she was six and giving her weekly allowance to the poor, she was the size of a grown man. When she got to be the size of Michelangelo's David, my dad split. He couldn't take it and it wasn't even over yet.

My sister is pretty comfortable with her proportions. The one real problem is maintaining her privacy and lifestyle. People always want her for something. She's been approached by the CIA, the Department of Defense, a circus or two, and some Polish rock bands to serve her country or make herself some bucks. "I have decided to forego the generous offers, " she announced on televison last year. Her voice was firm and cool. "I will devote my life to the cause of freedom, animal rights, vegetarianism, world peace, and opposition to United States militarism against the Third World. If I can persuade others to join me in the struggle, so much the better."

I get the impression that my sister's thing doesn't exactly turn on your average TV viewer, because most of the reporters and talent scouts stopped coming around. What we did see more of, though, were wide-eyed little kids, trembling with hope, who camped out on my doorstep in their parkas and sneakers wanting to get a glimpse of my sister and to help her fight imperialism and the devouring of our furry and feathered friends. I despised those kids as wimps and weirdos and told them so when I came home soused in the evenings.

While I sleep it off, my sister is out improving the quality of human life. She pulls whole fruit trees out of the ground in Great Falls and gives them to the poor, who on the whole would rather have fries and a shake.

Around this time I was drinking a lot. I hated the world. One morning I gazed in the mirror and noticed that my pants legs were flapping over my shoes. "Losing inches?" My sister was looking through the window over my shoulder. I tried to shut the shutters but I couldn't get away from that voice. She waited for a bit, whistling through her teeth. Then she said, "Look, you know you're really not doing anything now. Would you consider working for me? Food service, errands, press releases. I'll cover your rent and movie money and any emergencies that come up. On the condition that you give up drinking, of course. That's not what I'm about and you know it's not good for you."

I didn't answer. I just stood there tiny in the dark. "Think about it," came that insistent voice. She was trying to joke now. "The height you save may be your own. You wanna end up like Tom Thumb? Stand tall while there's still time—women of stature are where it's at." Then I heard her walking down the road.

She wasn't trying to rub it in. She was just being practical. That's her way. And besides, I couldn't claim to be sitting on any kind of high horse, having been given the sack from about eight jobs. So I accepted my sister's generous offer that afternoon. It's been a year now.

My sister's boyfriend climbs on her leg, pulling at her skirt. She smiles and holds him in her arms like a puppy or a retarded three-year-old. He's a beautiful scruffy stripling with the jewelly eyes of a zealot or a sand-shark. I wonder how they do it? I bet everybody else wonders too, but nobody would ever dream of asking.

I bring out a bushel of hummus, nearly breaking my back in the process, and wheel a plastic-lined shopping cart full of raw cauliflower to the yard. I need to go back indoors for the stack of pita, which is taller than I am, and the gallon drum of sesame oil dressing. No sooner is the food on the lawn than my sister's hand sweeps out and swipes up half the pita stack, the way you or I would clasp half a roll of quarters from the bank. Greedy. She always gets her food first—a big activist girl like that has to keep her strength up.

I'm looking for an out. I haven't had a drink in weeks, I just washed congealing chick-pea mash off my elbows, and I feel like breaking a rule. I've scavenged enough pocket change from the shopping for a brew, or maybe two. Can I make a break for the corner? They're all gabbling and gobbling away at the moment, watching my sister as she waves her hands in a gesture that makes me think of my father. "All government is the same," she says grandly. "Why vote? It just encourages them." The disciples nod at this startlingly original thought.

Tonight's the night. I gather the change off the dish in my bureau and quietly shut the back door and race on tiptoe down the alley. Stray cats run away.

One dollar and sixty-eight cents will buy a quart bottle of something cheap and strong, but all I have is a dollar sixty. "Can you give it to me for one-sixty?" I ask the Korean shop man behind the dirty bulletproof plastic. Away from my sister

I feel pretty darn big. Eight cents is not going to stand in my way. I am big, white, and urgently needing refreshment for my many friends and guests. The man snorts and puts it in a bag. I don't even swear I'll pay him later.

Outside the shop I open the bottle and tilt it. It bungs my teeth a good one, but I don't care. The beer tastes like cold fermented heaven. I'll just have a little swig and put it under the bed at home for later. O grinny, O joy. I duck back into the alley and start to scurry home.

I see my sister towering like a slagheap in the distance. Her face moves in my direction—has she seen me? I can't tell. She turns away. Her back faces me, unreadable. I'm getting closer to the house and pray that staying on tiptoes will keep her exactly where she is right this minute. I'm almost there....just a few more steps....yep....

She's tricked me. She's timed her turnaround down to the exact millisecond—my hand is on the doorknob. Damn. She peers around the house to gaze at me intently. Her expression is quizzical, falsely friendly, bogus-mellow. My tongue is filling up my mouth.

"Hey, pipsqueak. What you got there?" Her eyebrows jerk up and down.

I just stand there.

"What's in the bag?"

My beer. O piss. I wanted it so badly.

My sister sighs. I'm not cooperating. "Okay, okay, come around front." I open the door. "No, stupe, not through the house—think I was born yesterday? Come around over the fence....No, bring your brown bag with you." I'm struggling over the waist-length chain link; one of the seams of my pants groans in protest. "Need a lift?"

My sister can't help but snigger at the sight of me. I shake my head, not trusting myself to speak because I'm going to tell her to go fuck herself if I do. White scratches rise up on my arm and turn red. I limp panting onto the lawn.

My sister's friends sit motionless. They're thrilled and scared and gloating and trying to contain themselves, trying not to show it.

My sister says, "I see you went and got yourself something from the store. Would you like to share it with us? We have a communal ethic around here, you know."

"Be my guest."

"I think I will. Let's see what you've got in your hand."

I place the bottle in the crotch of a dead tree so my sister can reach down—I don't ever go near those hands if I can help it. She holds it between thumb and forefinger, like an insect, so I can see it slowly traveling through the air.

"Well well well. What have we here?" She tilts the bottle and some of the beer spills on her front. Deep fissures appear in her nose. "Yecch! You were walking around with this open? Like a street drunk or something. God, this shit smells awful." She tears off the bag. It floats away like a leaf in the wind.

My sister squints exaggeratedly at the brown bottle, as if it's an utterly foreign object. "Colt 45. How militaristic. Is this, by any chance, an alcoholic beverage?" This tickles her friends, who all titter at once.

I hear the beer blorting out of the bottle before it comes down on my head and shoulders and drenches me. It feels foamy, itches coldly; my sister's right, it does smell awful.

"Come over here," my sister says. The jocularity is gone. "Close your eyes." I shut them and her silhouette looms before me, hot pink against a black background. The air is completely still, so I hear the beer blorting out of the bottle before it comes down on my head and shoulders and drenches me. It feels foamy, itches coldly; my sister's right, it does smell awful. Now that it's over I just want to stand here forever. I don't want to open my eyes.

"Open your eyes." My sister looks at me hard for a second. Those eyes stretch on and on like the tundra. Then she lifts her head imperiously and throws the bottle in a nice clean arc of a good hundred feet into the dumpster across the way. I can hear it shattering into a million pieces.

"So that's that. You want to violate our agreement? Fine. Go ahead... Well, forget it. No point in dragging this out, is there?" Her nostrils are white with anger. She means it. I nod.

"Good. I suggest you go indoors and clean up, in more ways than one." My sister averts her face. Through the silent babies I walk with as much dignity as I can through the front door.

The minute I hit the living room I can hear the hubbub starting. First a gasp, then a giggle, and then half my so-called peers are clucking over me and the other half are talking animatedly about nothing in particular to cover it up. Like a wet dog I practically crawl in the direction of the shower. My hatred is big and heavy as my sister sitting on a Ford Camaro.

Then I hear my sister call my name. "Hey! Can we please have some more pita before you freshen up?" Fuck her with a phone booth. I hate her, it's like a rash I have to scratch In the kitchen I drop-kick a bag of broccoli through the door and all the way across the living room. A fist-sized sprig drops on the kitchen floor and I viciously grind it into the linoleum. I begin tearing plastic wrap off the pita loaves—my sister's hands are too big and clumsy to do this—and notice that I am ripping the bread as well. So what. Fuck her. I don't care if my employment history reads like a hail of bullets. I'm qutting tomorrow and going on a three-day drunk if I have to sell my ass to do it.

I pile stacks of pita on the tray and start to step out to the back. They're quiet out there, they must hear me coming. I open the screen door with my elbow.

My sister's coughing.

All the babies are staring at her, motionless.

"Are you all right?" one of them asks.

She's coughing. She crouches with her fists clenched.. A cough rumbles and rocks her back and forth on her heels. She shakes her massive head to and fro, first to say no, she's not all right, then desperately fast to dislodge what's stuck in her throat. She rears backwards, strikes her throat with the palm of her hand. It doesn't make a difference, just turns one cough into a hiccough.

"What are we gonna do?" asks one baby. She looks at another baby, who looks dopily at my sister coughing as if she's never going to stop. We all stand there.

My sister's cough is getting drier and sharper. The spaces between the coughs are shorter now—they are merging into one continous spasm. Her hands are shaking in tiny little jerks.

"Do something!" her boyfriend shouts at no one.

My sister struggles to her feet and bends over at the waist. Her eyes open wide in terror. With the biggest cough of all they narrow and fill with tears. She opens her mouth as big as she can—the effort narrows her eyes to tiny slits—and thrusts her fingers far back inside. It's not

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working. She tries to scream through the cough but she can't. One of the little girls starts to cry.

I know. "Lie down!" I scream. She can't hear me, she's throwing her head back again. I run to her—it's risky, she's lurching around and not watching where she's going—and strike her on the calf with my fist, hard. I jump up and down and wave my arms and scream. "Lie down! Lie down by me! "

Through the tears and pain she sees me, understands. She brings herself down to the ground so fast it makes me dizzy and I have to back out of the way. I grab ropes of her hair to bring her head to lie down sideways in the ground. Her cheek crushes the zinnias; her jerking bangs her face up and down in the dirt.

"Open up!....Wider—wide's you can!" My mouth is full of gasoline and battery acid. I'm going to barf.

She opens up and I get closer. It's so dark and glistening and her eyes are looking over it, wet and full of hope.

The first cough throws me backwards and covers me with saliva. Got to go in again. The dry tongue abrades my arm, wriggles like a child's body. "Try not to move it!" I shriek. It's so slippery behind the tongue and I can't see what's going on. She coughs and her mouth shuts halfway. The blow of her blunt teeth on my arm is tremendous and I scream. Her eyes fill with more tears, she didn't mean to do that. I draw back for a moment at the rim of her lip.

My shoulder and head are going to have to go in too. I'm breathing her carbon monoxide. It's roaring and shaking in here. I claw the walls of her mouth with my other hand to get a foothold to go in deeper—mucosile walls, incredibly soft and wet. The uvula dangles in front of me.

I stand on tiptoes and put my whole body behind my arm and dive down, or up, I can't tell, like a basketball player putting a ball in the hoop, and strike the back of her throat as hard as I can, a clean hard blow.

There's a tiny pause. I must have struck her gagger, because everything goes still. In her mouth I wait.

Then she coughs and there's more air and strength behind the cough. It's complete, it's dredging up and carrying what's trapped. There it is coming out surprisingly gently, like a bowling ball on the ramp into my hand—a hunk of cauliflower the size of a small sapling stump. Through my sister's gasps I hear myself sigh. She gags once again as I pull myself out slowly and feel myself falling away, lying backwards on the lawn.

My sister rights herself. She bows her head and clears her throat and wipes the tears from her eyes with her sleeve. Looking around to find me, she sees me and tries to smile. It takes effort to speak. She has to dig the words up.

"Thank you," she says. ■

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Out Of Their Heads

Hard-edged rock and roll from Washington, DC with roots in Rites of Spring and Pylon. Fire Party tours Europe in February and March; their debut album is due this spring on Dischord Records.

PHOTO BY BERT QUIEROZ

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Fire Party: Amy Pickering (lead vocals); Natalie Avery (guitar); Kate Samworth (bass); Nicky Thomas (drums).

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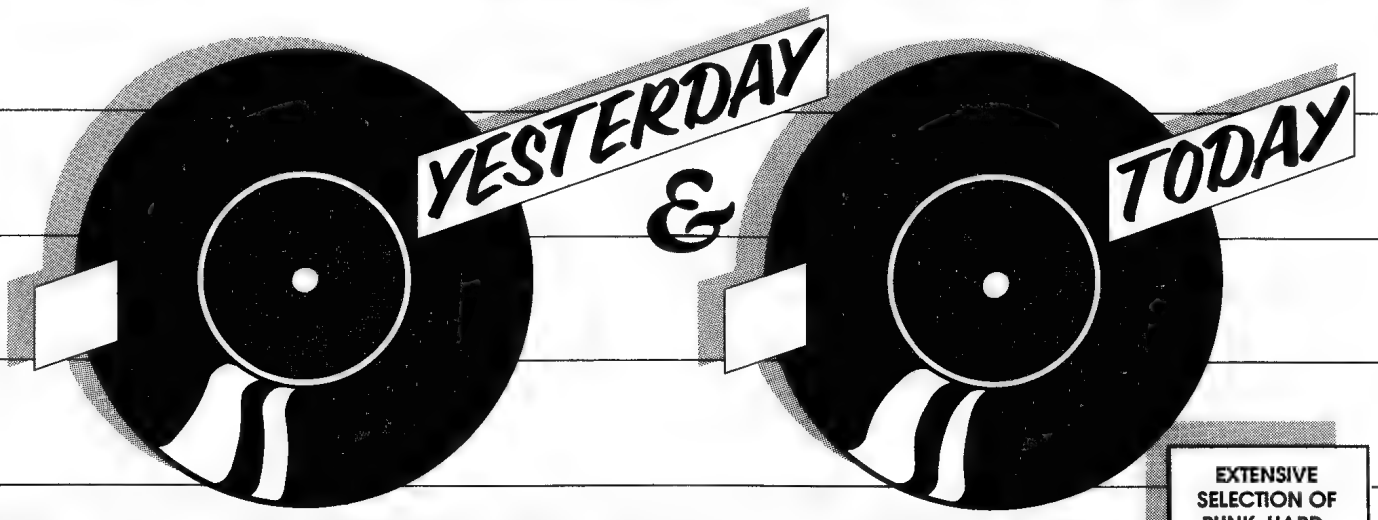

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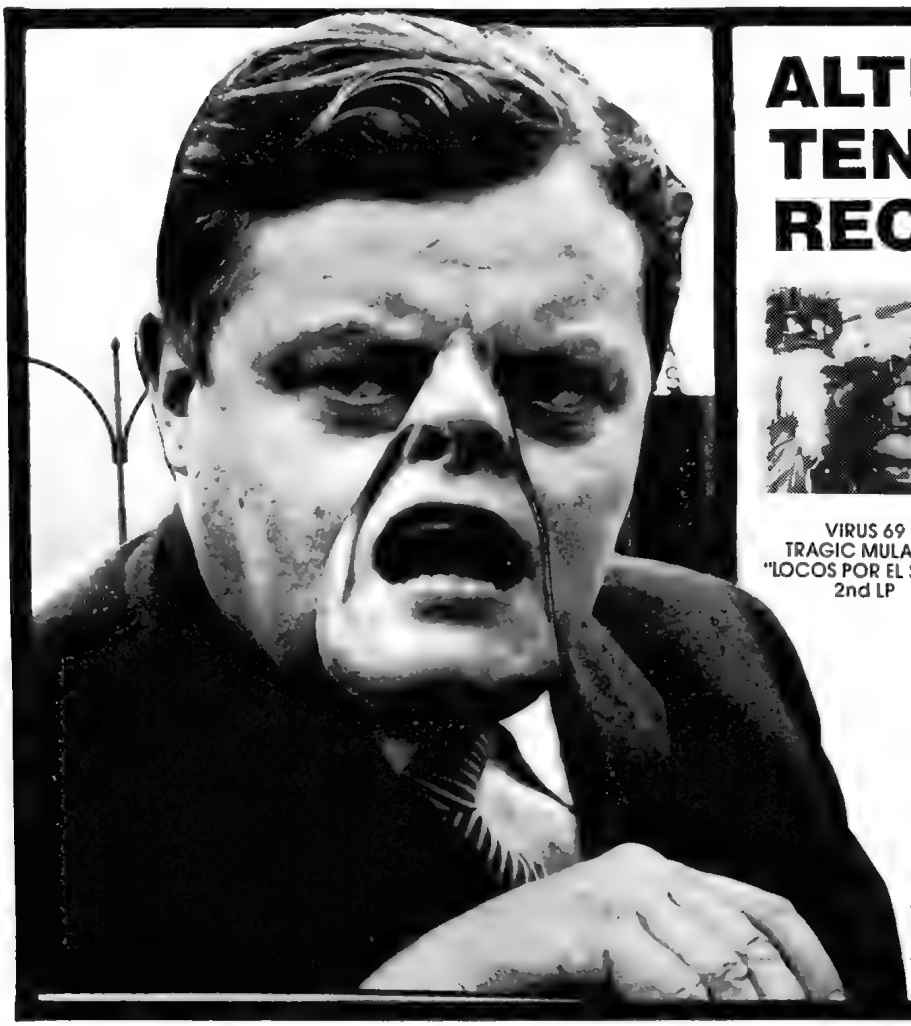

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BLACK FLAG

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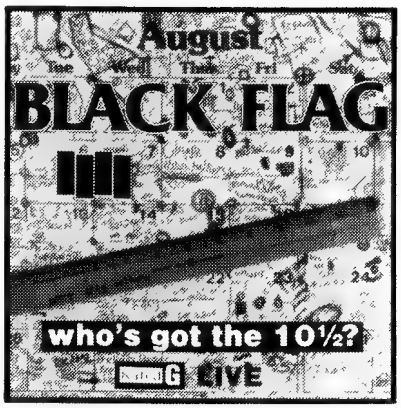
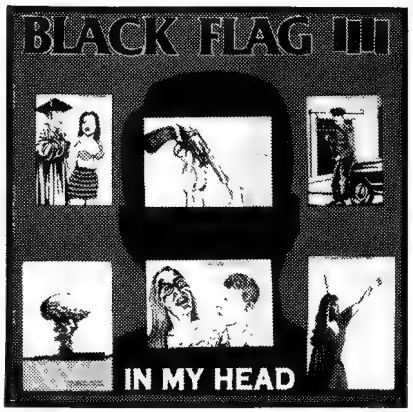
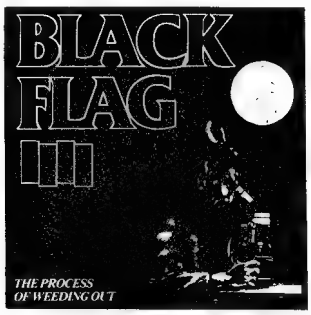


Who's Got The 10 ½? This release catches the Flag unfurled one night in Portland, Oregon LP, 40 minutes, cassette, 70 minutes Either version has enough Flag fury to raise the dead Contains My War, Loose Nut, and Louie, Louie (SST 060 LP/CA $7.50 CD $15.00)

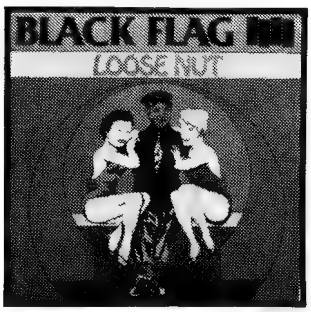


In My Head. Nine new Flag songs Produced by Greg Ginn, this 1985 release of crunching rock tunes like Drinking And Driving and Retired At 21 destroys Cassette features three bonus tracks SST 045 (LP/CA $7 50 CD $15.00)

Annihilate This Week. The ultimate party anthem of all time is backed with Best One Yet and Sinking on this smoking twelve-inch by Black Flag These three are available only on his disc and the cassette (SST 060) SST 081 (12" 45 $5 50)



The Process Of Weeding Out. Greg, Kira and Bill combine on this 1985 recording of four instrumental cuts of pure Falg fever Screw The Law, The Last Affront, Southern Rise, and the title track. (SST 037 12" 45, CA $7 00)



Loose Nut. 1985 saw this release of nine slabs of Flag's potent blend of metal and madness. Greg, Kira, Henry and Bill combine to create classics like Bastard In Love, Annihilate This Week plus seven SST 035 (LP/CA $7 50 CD $15.00)

Slip It In. Released in 1984, this Flag album has Kira, Bill, Henry and Greg working through eight pile-driving songs like Slip It In, Black Coffee, My Ghetto and You're Not Evil SST 029 (LP/CA $7 50 CD $15.00)

Family Man. 1984 saw the release of this stunning record that showcases the diversity of Black Flag. Side one contains nine riveting readings by Henry of his poetry Side two has four instrumentals with bassist Kira SST 026 (LP/CA $7 50 CD $15.00)

My War. This pivotal 1984 release features nine blasts of primal power. Henry and Greg are joined by Dale Nixon (Greg Ginn) on bass and Bill Stevenson on drums for My War, Nothing Left Inside, I Love You and six more SST 023 (LP/CA $7 50 CD $15 00)

BLACK FLAG: Everything Went Black. A compilation released in 1983, this record examines the eras of Flag before Henry Johnny Bob, Chavo and Dez plus outrageous radio ads Songs include Gimme, Gimme, Gimme (three versions), My Rules and Louie Louie SST 015 (2xLP/CA $10 00 CD $15 00)

Damaged. Recorded in 1981, the songs on this LP defined an era Dez Cadena has moved to guitar, and Henry Rollins takes over as vocalist Stunning dual guitar Flag on Rise Above, Damaged I & II, and 15 others (SST 007 LP/CA $7.50) (SST 007/3 Damaged/Jealous Again CD $15 00)

The First Four Years. Sixteen classic BLACK FLAG aural riots. Originally appeared on SST 001, 003, 005, PBS 13 (infamous Louie Louie single) and two cuts from New Alliance compilations. SST 021 (CA only $7 50 CD $15 00)

Jealous Again. It's 1980 and Greg, Chuck and Robo have a new singer named Chavo Together these four produced an american classic Tracks include title song, Revenge, White Minority, No Values and You Bet We've Got Something Personal Against You SST 003 (12" 45 $6.50, included on CD 007)

Nervous Breakdown. The breakdown heard around the world in 1978 Greg Ginn, Chuck Dukowski, Brian Migdol and Keith Morris sing and play the title track plus Fix Me, I've Had It and Wasted SST 001 (7" 45 $3 00)

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Live '84. This is an amazingly accurate portrayal of Black Flag live in concert The Flag roar through Six Pack, My War, Jealous Again, Slip It In, Black Coffee and fourteen other incomparable Flag tunes. SST 030 (CA only $7 50)

Six Pack. Yet another vocalist for Flag, this time in the person of one Dez Cadena. Joining up with Greg, Chuck and Robo, Dez lends his vocal talents to Six Pack, I've Heard It Before and American Waste SST 005 (7" 45 $3 00)

TV Party. The dual guitars of Greg and Dez fuel these three songs recorded in 1982. Bill Stevenson and Emil share drum duties on TV Party, My Rules and I've Got To Run SST 012 (7" 45 $3 00)

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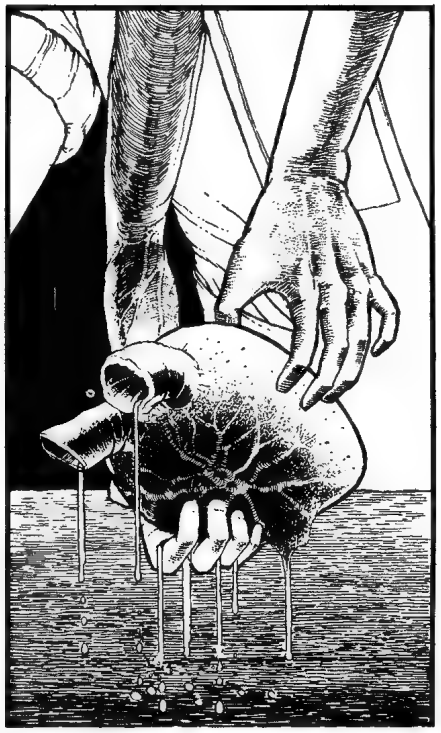
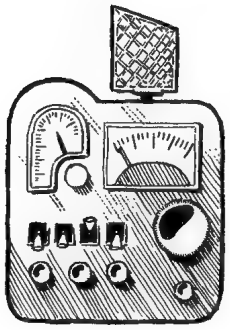
AS PART OF HIS PLAN FOR ESCAPE, DR. FRIEND NOW SPENDS HOURS EACH NIGHT TRAINING THE DEMON IN SURGICAL TECHNIQUE.

THE DEMON IS ABLE TO OPERATE WITH GREAT CARE AND PRECISION. ITS TINY HANDS ARE IDEALLY SUITED FOR DELICATE WORK.





A TWO-WAY RADIO IS KEPT ON AT ALL TIMES. THE DOCTOR IS ON 24-HOUR CALL, AND THE DEMON MAKES SURE HE KEEPS TO HIS SCHEDULE. TONIGHT, THE RADIO ONLY BROADCASTS THE IDIOT CONVERSATION OF THE LEGION'S MEAT PATROL.

AT ISSUE ARE FIRE ANTS--RAMPAGING SWARMS, THREATENING TO INFECT THE BILLION-TON MASS OF COMATOSE MEAT WHICH SERVES AS THE CITY'S ONLY FOOD SOURCE.

MEAT PATROLLERS CAN BUTCHER LIVING FLANK MEAT--A MONTH'S WORTH AT A TIME--AND DRESS AND BANDAGE THE WOUND WITHOUT INFLICTING SERIOUS INJURY. ON THE OTHER HAND, FIRE ANTS FEED AT WILL, LEAVING A FESTERING MESS AFTER EATING THEIR FILL.

AFTER THE OPERATION, THE DOCTOR CLIMBS WEARILY TO BED. FROM ABOVE, A BEHEMOTH HEART POUNDS ARRHYTHMICALLY INTO THE GLOOM.

THE TRANCE FADES. WITH HIS FINAL VESTIGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS, HE WONDERS ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF DEVON, SQUINT, AND AGNES.

DURING THE TRANSITION, GLIMPSES OF THE PAST FLOOD HIS DOUBLE-MIND...

...TWENTY YEARS AGO, EARTH WAS INTACT. ALIENS CAME AND SCOOPED UP IRVING BRITTLE, THE MOST CORRUPT PRESIDENT IN U.S. HISTORY.

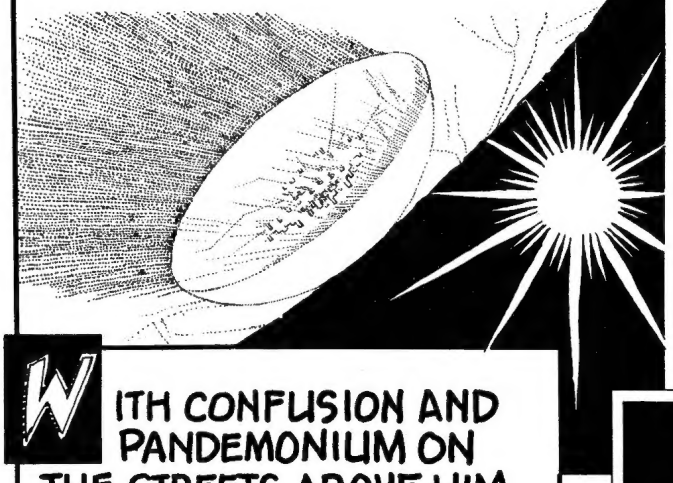
THEY PROBED HIS MIND WITH INCREDIBLE MENTAL POWERS (WHICH THEY AUGMENTED WITH PHENOM).

ANOTHER FAILED EXPERIMENT, THESE HUMANS?

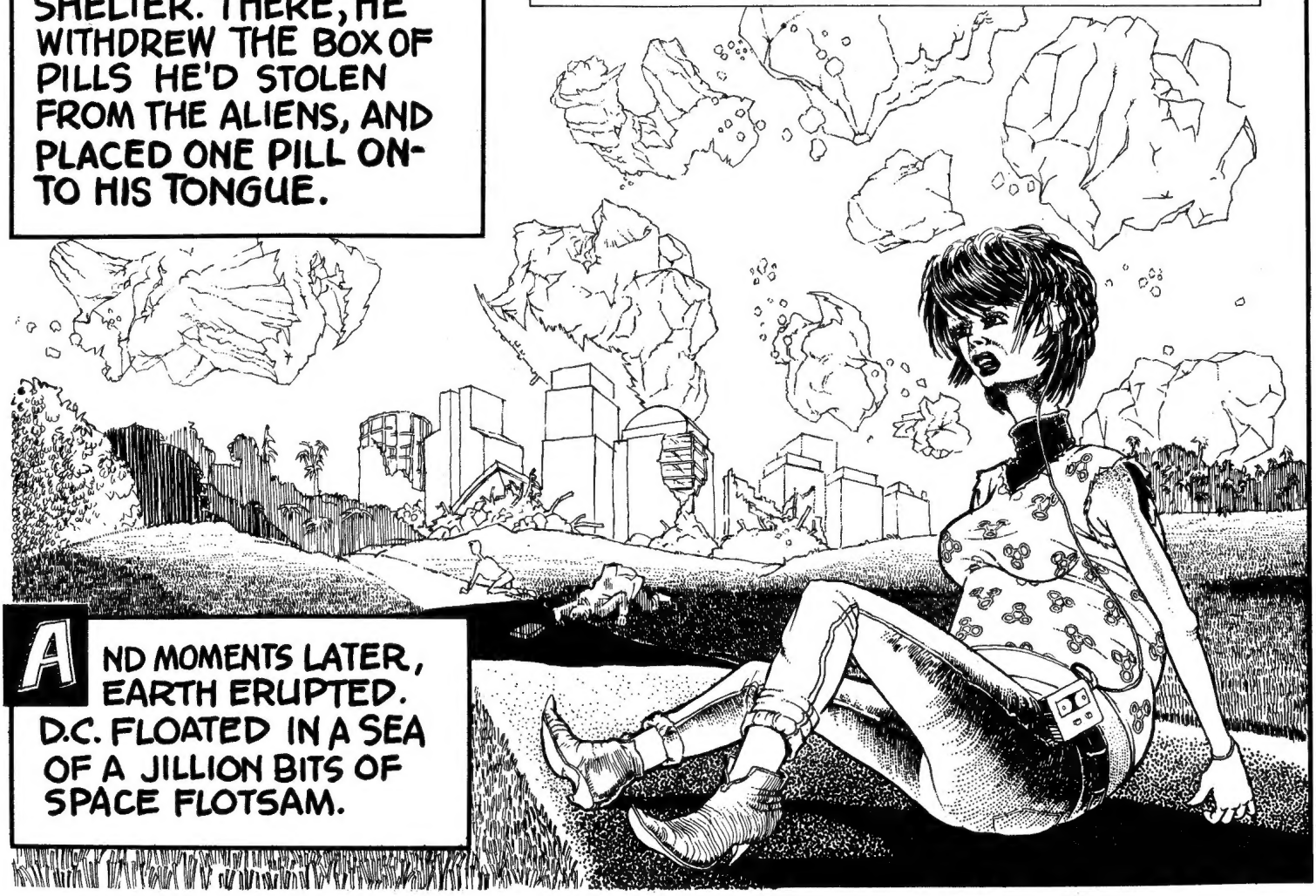
YES. WE'LL HAVE TO DESTROY THE PLANET.

WHY DO THEY ALWAYS COME OUT OF THE WATER?

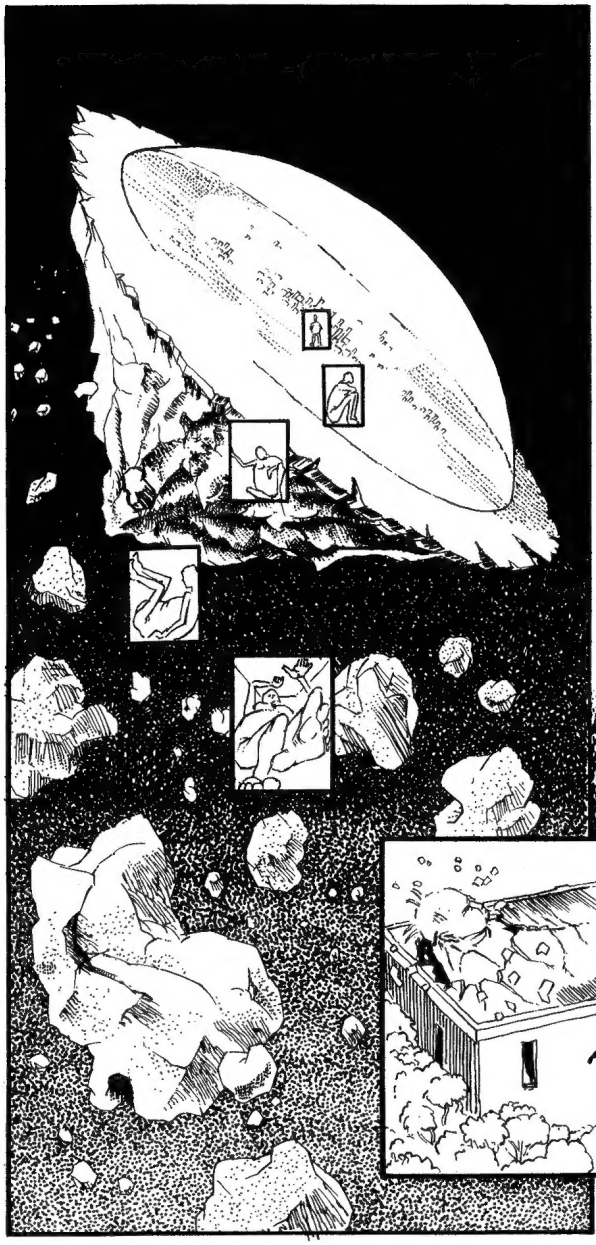
WHEN THE PRESIDENT RETURNED, HE ACTIVATED "THE DOME"--COVERING MOST OF WASHINGTON WITH IMPENETRABLE GLASS.



WITH CONFUSION AND PANDEMONIUM ON THE STREETS ABOVE HIM, BRITTLE CREPT INTO THE WHITE HOUSE BOMB SHELTER. THERE, HE WITHDREW THE BOX OF PILLS HE'D STOLEN FROM THE ALIENS, AND PLACED ONE PILL ONTO HIS TONGUE.

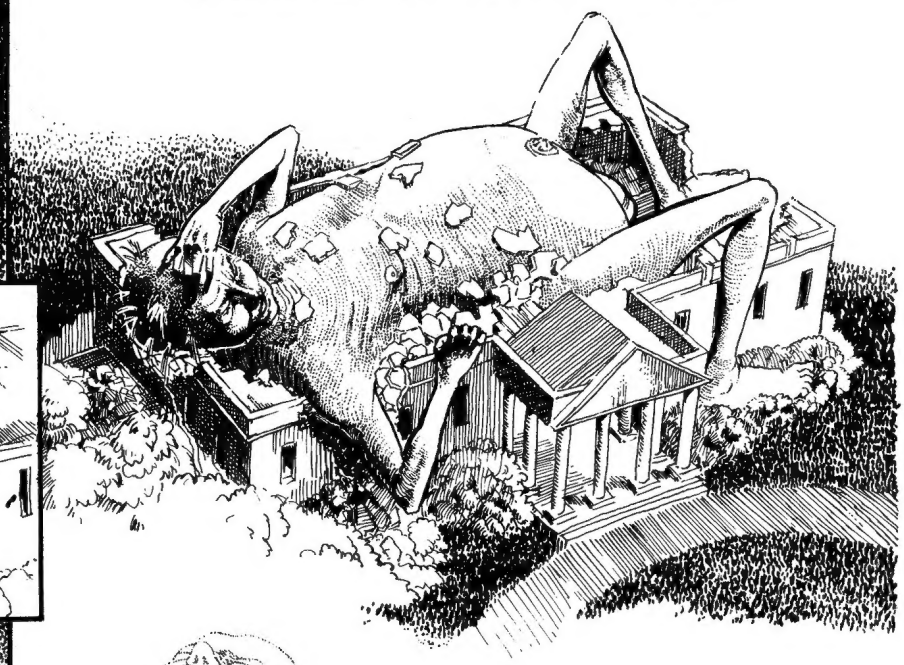


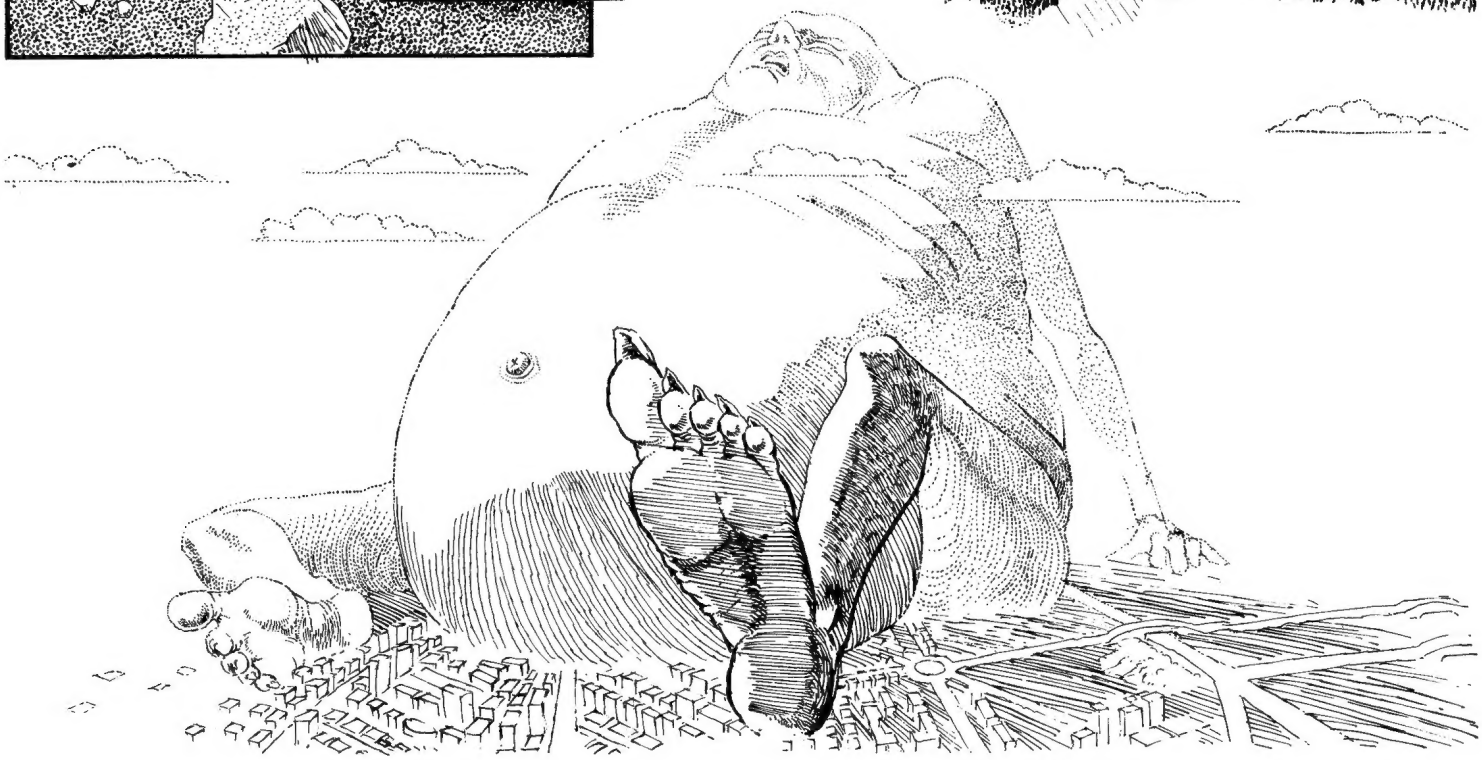
AND MOMENTS LATER, EARTH ERUPTED. D.C. FLOATED IN A SEA OF A JILLION BITS OF SPACE FLOTSAM.



PRESIDENT BRITTLE'S BODY BEGAN TO GROW. IN AN HOUR IT WAS 2½ MILES LONG. HIS MIND WAS COMPLETELY GONE.

PHENOM MADE HIM A DROOLING, ZILLION-TON IMBECILE. HE HAS BEEN IN A DEEP COMA FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS.





—TO BE CONTINUED.

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